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Jinnah betrayed

DISCIPLINE

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IN CASE OF
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(SOMERSAULT)

A B S Jafri

Jinnah betrayed

A B S Jafri

ROYAL BOOK COMPANY

P.O.BOX 7737 SADDAR, KARACHI-74400 PAKISTAN

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By the same author

From the Gallery

With foreword by H S Suhrawardy

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AIWAN-I-QUAID-I-AZAM
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The story of a trek from Hunza to China

The Founder

A short biography of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah

The Witch Doctor

With an indtroduction by Altaf Gauhar

Behind the killing fields of Karachi--a city refuses to surrender

With an introduction by Altaf Gauhar

Snapshots of SHAME 1996

A diary of sad experiences in the year 1996.

Out of Mind

Essays, Illustrated by Anwar Ali and Syed Akhtar Shah

(Under print)

Title visualisation

ROQUYYA JAFRI

Based on cartoons courtesy Maxim (in The Nation, Lahore & Islamabad)

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Dedicated...

TO the people of Pakistan...
Who have endured since autumn, 1958 to this day,
systematic sabotage of democracy,
subversion of foundation organs of the state.

Who have suffered heart-rending consequences
of arrest and detention without warrant,
imprisonment without trial.

Who have been persecuted for their principles,
associations, loyalties, ideas and faith.

Who have silently suffered humiliation, injury
and pain without any relief or recompense
from the state, community or courts.

Who have lived in undeserved deprivation,
poverty, social disadvantage and disability.

Who work on the farms and factories and are
denied proper wages and due dignity.

Who, being women must risk indignity,
even murder, for choosing the person
they wish to share life with.

Who are children but must go to the factory
to work, not to school to learn and play.

Who are sick without medicine, infirm without support,
heartbroken without solace, forlorn without company
orphans without embrace, widows without hope.

Who have seen or suffered onslaughts on human dignity
at the hands of three military dictators
and three despots with false civilian pretensions.

Who wait hopefully for the day when true freedoms
Shall flourish and pursuit of happiness will be the
equally shared right of all
that lives, and would ever live here. ---
the human being, the beast in the wild and
the wilderness itself!

Acknowledgement

THE nation has been witnessing in deepening dismay a dispiriting pageant as one depressing scene unfolds after another, day after day. A threat runs through all this. It occurred to me that there was a need to put some of the more shocking of these experiences together. That is just what this book seeks to present:

In this effort I have found a striking similarity in the perceptions of the legendary cartoonist *maxim* of the great newspaper, *The Nation*. In *maxim* I feel happy to say that I have found a soul mate. *maxim* has always been generous towards me. Most of the pieces in this book have been embellished with gems from *maxim*'s inimitable creations. His contribution articulates the sentiments more effectively than the written word. Had I not been able to draw upon the inexhaustible treasure of *maxim* most probably this book would not have seen the light of day.

I owe a great deal of thanks for the assistance I have received from many professional friends. Special mention must be made of the help rendered by Mirza M Nayyar who placed the production facilities of his advertising outfit, the Oscar at my disposal. This included the magnificent contribution from Izhar Ahmad Khan, also of the Oscar Advertising. My colleagues at The Finance, Zafar Abbas, Maqsood Ahmad Khan and Mohammad Shafi Sidick have been of much assistance.

What I consider a service beyond thanks is proof reading. As for all my previous books, this one, too, has been taken excellent care of by Mrs Farriel Shahid. She deserves special mention and thanks.

—A B S J

Karachi, December 4, 1999.

Publisher's note

ONCE again the Royal Book Company has the pleasure of publishing a book from A B S Jafri. This is his third brought out by this publishing house in less than six years. Mr Jafri's book *Behind the killing fields of Karachi -- a city refuses to surrender* has left its mark as an outstanding contribution to literature on Karachi, the largest and most complex of cities in this country. So did his book *Snapshots of shame* 1996.

The present book should be a jolting reminder to the people of Pakistan that they continue to stray farther and farther away from the path laid down for this nation by its founder, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

The author identifies the pillars upon which the Quaid-i-Azam built the edifice of a parliamentary democratic state, liberal, progressive and moving forward with the march of time. Pakistan today is notable only as an audacious antithesis of all those values.

This is a turning point in history in as much as nations are earnestly thinking of what they are carrying into the next century and what they had better leave behind to be taken care of by museums and books of history.

Pakistan has been moving in the reverse gear for the last quarter of the century, and moving with a vengeance. Few in Pakistan seem to be thinking at all. The visible reality is an unrelieved wilderness.

A point that Jafri makes sharply and persistently is that the Quaid commanded an awesome and universally respected reputation for being utterly incorruptible. Pakistan has come to be rated amongst the most corrupt countries in the world.

It is also to be noted that our record on human rights, particularly the rights of the girl child and women, is getting more and more soiled by the passing day. It is a state at the end of the 20th century where feudal lords and Waderas brazenly maintain private prisons and slave camps. Some religious sectarian groups have their sipah, or army.

Again, Jafri laments the decline in our democratic polity. For the last 41 years no government in Pakistan has risen to power according to the disciplines laid down in the fundamental law in force. None has been replaced in accordance with the constitution in existence for the time being.

The country has had several different constitutions only to be disregarded and ultimately to be subverted.

Jafri challenges the political leadership and intellectuals of Pakistan to sit back and realise that this tainted record just cannot be reconciled with the principles held sacred and dear by the founder of this state and the maker of this nation. If this is not betrayal, pray what on earth would be betrayal?

This book can be the eye opener Pakistan needs more than anything else. As such we present this shocker to the nation that needs this treatment at this moment, as a matter of some urgency

— Jamshed Mirza

Karachi, December 10, 1999.

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Preface

THESE short pieces give voice to the stabs of pain we suffer all the time as we tentatively subsist in this "Islamic" republic. In the early and euphoric days of our career, this land was rather wishfully designated as Daulat-e-Khuda-dad -- the God-given state. To call Pakistan by that name now would amount to sacrilege. You cannot associate divinity with Pakistan in its present condition, can you? Look at today's Pakistan from any angle, it bears the look of an audacious, comprehensive and agonising antithesis of all those attributes and values held dear and sacred by the Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Today's Pakistan is an outrageous betrayal of all the political, social and moral principles and virtues that the noble Quaid cherished and virtually personified.

This country is now among the most corrupt, most cruel, most crime-ridden, poverty-stricken, frustrated, fractured, benighted in the world. Nature has so lavishly endowed it that this Pakistan could be rich, beautiful and secure. It was not meant to be so wretched. But that is just what it is. Every aspect of life in Pakistan mocks at its inimitable founder.

As a nation we ought to have an excruciatingly troubled conscience. We have betrayed the founder in matters of the deepest consequence. Read his first address,* to the Constituent Assembly, then read the preamble and Articles 2 and 2A of the constitution of this Islamic republic.** The basic premise of the guidelines set for us by the founder of the nation, and the basic provisions of the frequently and also fraudulently interpolated constitution under which we are now made to bide our time, are irreconcilable. The country is less than half of what the founder gave us. There is no suggestion anywhere in our word or deed that we are sorry for the way we have hacked away more than half of our dear Pakistan -- with our own hands. In our national consciousness there is no trace of regret, remorse or repentance.

Historians have told us that the British empire was built in a fit of absent-mindedness. This state was founded on the crest of a preternatural surge of

noble emotion. Pakistan started as a Movement that spread like light after daybreak. There were ardent, dedicated Pakistanis all over this vast sub-continent years before Pakistan materialised as a sovereign state. They were the invincible 'Soldiers of Pakistan.' They could be found in the remotest nooks and corners of this south Asian region of literally infinite variety. It is a terrible irony of history that when that irresistible force of history came to have a home, it was in areas where the Pakistan Movement as such had yet to strike roots. The pristine pioneering spirit of the Pakistan Movement remains alien to the psyche of Pakistan as we find today.

Why are we in such a state of disarray and despair today?

Take a look at the pages of the hundred years of the history of these regions between 1840 and 1940. Make no mistake. The year 1940 is an epochal watershed in the march of time as far as more than one billion people in South Asia are concerned. In the 1840s, this part of the sub-continent was teetering on the verge of anarchy. This was the time when the Sikh Raj was losing its vitality. It was soon to give up the ghost. The British (East India Company) were groping tentatively. The British Raj would still take more than a decade and a half to arrive with the full fury and authority of the most powerful empire in history. But that was not to be before the fag end of the terrible upheaval of 1957.

The year 1940, that is more or less a century later, was the year of destiny. South Asia was never to be the same again. Lahore provided the stage of history for the first act of one of the most unbelievable epics of modern times. On March 23 of that year Iqbal Park (then Minto Park) saw the Pakistan Movement inaugurated. The resolution visualising the birth of Pakistan was moved by Molvi Fazlul Haq of Bengal. The very mover of the Pakistan Resolution was to be accused of being an Indian agent, a traitor, soon after the birth of Pakistan. He was the first among several to be so 'decorated.'*** However, not long after this outrage, the very same Molvi Fazlul Haq was to become the chief monitor of patriotism as the interior (home) minister in the government of Pakistan.

The country is becoming more and more like it was in the early and middle 19th century. Now, as in those days more than a hundred and fifty years ago, the writ of the state is feeble. The authority of law is under constant assault. It is violated with manifestly questionable intentions. The state does not take due cognizance of such wrongdoing by its own functionaries. Feudals and Waderas, generally called 'the influentials,' are above and beyond the reach of law. Indeed, law is losing its sovereign authority, justice its paramount sanctity. As for the grip of the government, at its best, it is timid, unsure, almost apologetic.

For the thoughtful citizens it is becoming harder and harder to ward off the fear that we might be moving in the reverse gear, returning to our world

as it was in the 1840s when the state lay prostrate and crumbling away. As we daily notice to our dismay, enforcement of law is tentative. Dispensing of justice between citizen and citizen is whimsical. Justice between the citizen and state is uncertain. Tribal chiefs hold their arbitrary and autocratic sway in their little fiefdoms. They fight their battles, engage in "honour killing" of their women, compose their feuds and settle their accounts regardless of the law and the state institutions. As if about the state they could not care less.

In the Frontier province we have areas where the normal laws of the land do not apply, even though 'representatives' from those areas sit in the parliament and participate in the making of those laws! Whatever little of law that nominally applies in those pockets, dates back to when the British East India Company was fighting its Afghan wars, using these regions as the springboard. These are not laws made by any legislature in Pakistan. The correct name for these 'laws' is Frontier Crimes Regulations. Their origin lies in the 19th century. The author of these laws is the late East India Company, the predecessor of the late British Raj in the sub-continent, -- not the state of Pakistan..

In what are called the FATA (federally administered tribal areas) and the PATA (provincially administered tribal areas) the normal laws of the present Islamic republic of Pakistan command little respect, carry little force. Nor is the administration of the republic able to exercise in these areas any authority on behalf of the state. In these pockets the system of law and order, crime, punishment and 'justice' is still tribal, bearing no relationship or even resemblance with the statute book of Pakistan. The people in those areas live by their unwritten tribal code, not by the legal code of Pakistan.

There are many areas now in Balochistan, the Frontier province and also in Sindh, where the tribal rivalries and feuds determine the pattern of life of the people, regardless of the laws, administration and system of justice as per the constitution of the Islamic republic of Pakistan. The tribes carry on their feuding and fighting. They settle their scores without recourse or resort to the established institutions of the state like law enforcing agencies (the LEAs) and courts of law.

In addition to the tribes and their chiefs, 'Pirs' 'Ulema,' 'Mashaikh' and obscure characters of a hundred different descriptions hold their sway over the people in blatant disregard of the laws of this Islamic republic. The organs of the state and the functionaries of the state in such areas are at best silent and inactive spectators. That is, when they are not participating on the side of wrongdoing and against the laws they are supposed to enforce.

Where state outposts like police stations do exist. such institutions remain, for the large part, a law unto themselves. Orders of the courts of law, including the higher courts, are disregarded by police and executive

functionaries with virtual impunity. Big landlords are known to run their own little states, complete with their armed guards, mercenary ruffians, and thugs -- the Patharidars. These feudals and Waderas have their own jails where slaves and serfs are held prisoner. State services like the police and magistracy look the other way. In many cases these functionaries of the state have little choice. When the state itself is not interested in enforcing its authority, how can these little servants of the state bear and uphold the flag?

In today's Pakistan, religious sects have come to have an extraordinary status, amounting to autonomy and self-determination, regardless of the state. The larger sectarian outfits have their own armies. These forces, called Sipah, are armed, have their own commanders and command system on the lines that appear to bear some similarity with the military image. Nobody can tell how the state permits the existence and operation of private armies (the Sipahs) when the Constitution would not countenance any such force(s) other than the national Army under the Army Act.

Activists of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) have been waging a determined struggle to bring this outrage of organised slavery to the notice of the governments of Pakistan. These efforts fail to evoke any consistent and effective response. It is thus a straight battle between the HRCP volunteers and the deeply entrenched feudals who have all along exercised awesome influence and clout within the obliging governments of Pakistan. It will be noted that this is not something new. We have been living with this shame for about 40, perhaps more, of the 52 years since we secured our independence from an alien empire. But whose independence, pray?

The tribals have their own concept of dignity and a brutally insensitive attitude towards 'honour.' 'Honour killing,' called 'karo kari' in some areas, is the established practice. We have witnessed situations in which parents and brothers destroy their women who are suspected to have "strayed" from the narrow, tortuous and darkly secret path of tribal mores and ethos. Here, too, the state is not supposed to have any say or sway. Unbelievable though it might appear to normal citizens, it is a fact nonetheless, that when this issue of extrajudicial 'honour killing' was mooted in the Senate, the legislators chose to stand on the side of the 'killers,' not the killed. The Senate is the senior house of parliament in our Islamic republic. This leaves one speechless.

A glaring example in recent months has been the killing of a girl from a 'noble' family. She was shot dead in cold blood while she was in the Lahore offices of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. She was being pursued relentlessly by her parents who were ultimately to succeed in killing their daughter. It was in search of the protection of law that the tormented girl had turned to the HRCP. She was destroyed before anyone could help

her. The state did not react to this killing, although the deed remains *prima facie* a cognizable offence of which the state is bound under law to take instant notice on its own. It did not. Who cares for the law?

This gory incident took place within walking distance of the legislature of the largest province, also called the heart of Pakistan. That murder has yet to be reported to the police, although it has been widely reported and commented upon in the national press. As noted above, even a debate in the Senate on this terrible killing ended in what was less than a whimper. We live on cheerfully. About the blood of that girl, so clearly visible on our hands, the numb conscience of this entire Muslim nation of 140 million people could not care less.

Saima, the girl so killed, does not haunt many Pakistanis in their dreams. Why? Because, we have ceased to have anything in the nature of a human heart.

Now, as never before in the history of Pakistan, police feel free to pick up anyone, hold their victims in illegal detention for any length of time, or release such victims after a settlement -- not necessarily under the table. These exchanges no longer bear any trace of inhibition of any kind. This is the 'done' thing. We are no longer disturbed on hearing about illegally held citizens dying in, or disappearing from, police custody. This happens so frequently that it has ceased to be of more than a passing and listless notice in our newspapers -- or their readers. Among such wretched people in unlawful incarceration, officers of higher judiciary have often chanced upon women, children, even infants (!) passing their days in wholly unlawful police custody. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, women under trial prisoners outnumber 9-1 to convicts serving their term (See appendix).

Another HRCP study finds that in Pakistan's jails now the number of under trial (male) prisoners (UTPs) is equal to convicts, if indeed not more. Instances frequently come to light of people held in prisons for ten or even twenty years without ever being produced in any court of law for trial. Yet they are described as UTP -- under trial prisoners. For their lives languished in unlawful detention by the state --- this Islamic republic -- the victim has no remedy from any quarter.

Our police are equipped with "Shoot-at-sight" authority when dealing with civil demonstrations. Ms Benazir Bhutto, a former prime minister has, in a rare moment of truth, admitted that during her government citizens lost lives in what were 'extrajudicial' killing -- by the state. Citizens getting killed in 'encounters' with the police is by no means rare. What is very rare, however, is a proper inquiry into the circumstances in which such 'encounters' took place and helpless citizens were killed as a result.

There is no public statement of the details of 'encounter' deaths. Who was

sought by the police? What was the identity of the person(s) actually killed? What was the offence the killed person(s) was believed to have committed? On whose complaint did the police act and who the police officers were that took part in the action? Under whose orders the action was carried out? Pakistan is now a state where the civil police enjoy the protection of secrecy. Normally, the police station is supposed to be open to the public; police record open to all, including the press. This is not necessarily the case in today's Pakistan.

Several 'Police reform commissions' have been appointed over the years. No government has cared to take any notice of the reports and recommendations formulated by them. Appointments, transfer and promotions in the police service are not governed by any rules or regulations. The convenience, preference or mere whim of the political minister is the deciding factor.

Is this the portrait of Pakistan as the Quaid-i-Azam visualised it?

The Quaid's conviction about the religion of the citizen and its relationship and relevance with the state has been set out in the most unambiguous terms in the foregoing. His actual words have been quoted. Do the people of Pakistan know that this statement has been censored out of many of the official publications of the state he founded? Is this not tantamount to stabbing the Quaid-i-Azam in the back, or beyond his grave? In the eyes of some people, this outrage would amount to inflicting gross contempt in the face of the founding father. Such, then, is the manner in which we treat Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, whom we have the temerity to call Father.

Oh, Goodness, what father and what children!

The Quaid i-Azam was among the most highly rated parliamentarians of this time. One can say, of all time. He played an effective and highly distinguished part in the proceedings of the Central Legislative Assembly of India. His speeches on the various policies and measures introduced by the British imperial government in pre-Pakistan India are a model of reasoning, parliamentary skills and excellence. He was a passionate believer in fundamental rights, democratic polity and parliamentary form of government. He was himself a towering parliamentarian. The early leaders of Pakistan had among them some accomplished parliamentary speakers. Early governments of Pakistan -- August 14, 1947-October 7, 1958 -- were parliamentary in spirit as well as form.

Opinion may differ on when exactly the onslaught on Pakistan's democratic culture began. However, few would seriously dispute that one of the first deadly attacks was mounted on October 24, 1954. Pakistan then was barely seven years old when governor-general Ghulam Mohammad dissolved the sovereign legislature that was the nation's elected parliament and also the Constituent Assembly preparing the constitution of the new state. This out-

rage was accompanied by an arbitrary change in the federal government.

It is worthy of note that the then prime minister Mohammad Ali Bogra from East Pakistan was replaced by Chaudhri Mohammad Ali of West Pakistan. This was in violation of an unwritten but sacred covenant under which the two highest offices of the state -- governor-general and prime minister -- were not to be held by persons from the same wing of the two-winged federation of Pakistan. Governor-general Ghulam Mohammad had, in one fell stroke of gross political vandalism, destroyed the fundamentals of Pakistan as visualised by its founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

These wholly unconstitutional actions were followed by the institution of a calculated system of intimidation and suppression of political dissent in Pakistan. Molvi Tamizuddin Khan, president of the dismantled parliament and Constituent Assembly, had to go through crass harassment in a bid to silence him. How he was hounded is another story. On November 7, 1954 Molvi Tamizuddin Khan managed to file in Sindh High Court a writ petition challenging the dissolution of the nation's parliament that was also functioning as Constituent Assembly. His petition was upheld by the Sindh High Court but was soon overturned by the Supreme Court headed by Justice Mohammad Munir.

That was the beginning of the end of constitutional polity in Pakistan. In the following years to this day Jinnah's Pakistan has mostly lived in what has been a long, dark night, with only some evanescent flashes of false dawns.

In 1956 a second Constituent Assembly gave the country a constitution. Before the general elections visualised in the new constitution could be held, the governor-general, now in a derelict physical and mental condition, went on the rampage, playing havoc with the institutions of the state. By now he was all but totally demented. Wonder of wonders, he continued to be an absolute head of the state. An American newspaper portrayed Pakistan of those days as a state run by a 'half lunatic, half paralytic.' Such indeed it was.

At this stage the chief of Pakistan Army, General Mohammad Ayub Khan was inducted into the federal government as minister for defence.

With an element of inevitability, these moves led to the end of even the inane pretence of following the path that Mohammad Ali Jinnah had quite clearly delineated for the political evolution of the state he had founded. On October 7, 1958 General Iskander Mirza (who had by then replaced governor-general Ghulam Mohammad), subverted the government established by law, such as law had by then come to be. He appointed General Mohammad Ayub Khan, then the defence minister and commander in chief of Pakistan Army, to take over as the 'prime minister' of a Pakistan where the fundamental law had been all but subverted.

After 20 days as 'prime minister' and the chief of Pakistan's Army, General Mohammad Ayub Khan declared martial law in the country on October 27, and styled himself as the Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA). This was the first of the several such onslaughts on Pakistan's political destiny. Simultaneously, he toppled his patron, governor-general General Iskander Mirza. The ousted governor-general was then forced to leave the country immediately -- and for good. He died in London, unwept and unsung.

All this adds up to an incredible betrayal of the principles of Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Betrayal was going to grow more and more gross as the years were to pass by. Once the door to violence against constitutional democracy is opened, who knows where this kind of lunacy would end? In the Pakistan that Jinnah the parliamentarian founded, the parliamentary form of government was supplanted by a martial law regime that ran roughshod over every remaining vestige of democratic values and institutions. Even the concept of parliamentary democracy was to be crudely reviled before being brashly abandoned.

General Ayub, later to be elevated to Field Marshal by a vote of his hand-picked cabinet, heaped contempt on democracy in any form. He invented what he chose to call "basic democracy" of which he was to be virtually the chief for life. As fate would have it, the Field Marshal was to be overthrown by his own portage, General Agha Mohammad Yahya, now the army chief. Once again the country saw democracy (this time Ayub's version of it) subverted and the people pushed back into the demeaning yoke of martial law. This curse was to plunge Pakistan into what was little short of civil war culminating in the dismemberment of the country.

The Pakistan founded by Mohammad Ali Jinnah was reduced to less than half.

Up to the time the Ghulam Mohammad-Iskandar Mirza-Ayub Khan conspiracy subverted the state of Pakistan, parliament had been supreme. Seven governments changed but all changes were legal, peaceful and dignified. No criminal proceedings were launched by any successor government against the prime minister or any minister or senior bureaucrat of the preceding government. There is nothing essentially wrong in governments changing, if the change is in accordance with the fundamentals of law of the land. Up to the autumn of 1958, the infant Pakistan, beset with immense problems and tests of survival, remained loyal to the political principles, values, and faith of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation.

From that point -- October 7, 1958 -- in our history to this day, this nation has lived in disgracefully brazen betrayal of the founder. There is some justification to trace the beginning of Pakistan's misfortunes back to October 24, 1954 when governor-general Ghulam Mohammad made his bullish

assault on the political and moral China shop of the infant republic. In what historians must describe as a wanton act, General Mohammad Ayub Khan destroyed elected legislatures. He also pulled out the parliamentary system by its roots. He destroyed not only the constitution of the republic but, in effect, exterminated the concept of constitutional democracy, irrespective of its shape or form. He killed and buried Jinnah's political culture of democracy as such. In its place, Ayub Khan surfaced with that enormity he relished to call "Basic Democracy."

It is sad to recall that in this perverse exercise to destroy the remains of democracy, Ayub Khan was, as we have seen, consecrated by the judiciary at the highest level. This extraordinary turn in our history was followed by another nail in the coffin of the strangled parliamentary democracy in the Pakistan founded by Mohammad Ali Jinnah.. Barrister Manzur Qadir, who was the pride of the legal profession in Pakistan of those days, guided Ayub Khan to bury constitutional democracy. On its grave, the edifice of impostor democracy under the name of "Basic Democracy," was erected by Ayub Khan. This was the direct and inevitable fallout of the already propounded "Doctrine of Necessity" -- the contribution of Chief Justice Mohammad Munir of the Supreme Court of Pakistan to the 'constitutional evolution' of Pakistan.

It is a shattering irony of Pakistan that the state founded by an uncompromising advocate of parliamentary democracy was to see the foundation institutions of democratic polity systematically uprooted. Involved heartily in this unworthy enterprise were the cream of this country's constitutional lawyers. Not to be ignored is the part of the judges presiding over the highest courts of Pakistan. With all this monumental wreck and the ruin of the last shred of Jinnah's legacy, we pretend to be following in the footprints of Mohammad Ali Jinnah. We go into sham raptures once a year when his birthday turns round every December 25.

Is there no limit to our hypocrisy? Apparently, not.

When Ayub Khan himself, and his "Basic Democracy," became a bad joke and no longer sustainable, he once again subverted the constitution-- the so-called constitution that was crafted by himself. Under this constitution, he was supposed to hand over power to the Speaker of the 'elected' National Assembly. Let us not overlook the fact the election in this case was held on a woefully limited and selective franchise. Only 80,000 people out of Pakistan's 110 million could vote. When Field Marshal Ayub Khan could no longer stay in power, he handed the country over to his own creature and crony, General Agha Mohammad Yahya. The suspicion that Ayub did not hand over power, power was wrested from his palsied hands by General Agha Mohammad Yahya, may be credible. But this detail is immaterial. The fact to mourn is that even the parody of a fundamental law that

Ayub had foisted on the Pakistan that Jinnah made, was thrown into the dust bin by his own surrogate.

So much then for our respect for parliamentary democracy that was the ideal given to us by Jinnah.

What followed Gen Yahya's take-over is a tragedy too deep for tears, even if this nation in its present moral decrepitude has any tears left to shed. Before his ignominious departure, Gen Yahya had held a general election. It was a fair election by our standards. Why it was fair was only because General Yahya had no time or inclination to be bothered about anything. He was just too easy going to have bothered to doctor the election. The results of the elections were not to the taste of what Zulfikar Ali Bhutto so ominously identified as the "bastions of power."

Needless to assert, ZAB had become the mascot of the 'Bastions of power' only because it was power that he was after -- raw power and for its own sake.

To cut a terrible story short, the nation went through another trauma. It lost the eastern wing. Yahya's insane military enterprise ended in abject surrender by more than 90 thousand Pakistani troops, taken prisoners by the Indian army. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was invited to take over as Chief Martial Law Administrator though in civilian garb.

There was a sigh of relief insofar as the heart-breaking torment in East Pakistan had at last ended. Not many cared to notice the eternally irredeemable shame this self-inflicted humiliation had heaped on the nation that Mohammad Ali Jinnah had led into honourable freedom and sovereignty.

Two years later, Pakistan was restored to democracy under a constitution adopted without a note of dissent from any quarter. On March 23, 1973 -- an anniversary of the day 30 years ago, when the Pakistan resolution was adopted in the Iqbal Park of Lahore -- Pakistan returned to parliamentary democracy. But before long we were back to our bad ways. As the new democracy started ebbing away, the dictatorial tendency started taking over. Suppression of political dissent led to social unrest, inevitably leading to political upheaval. Dissent was then perceived as a reassuring sign that the nation was not dead, not yet.

Martial law returned to Pakistan. This time to stay for more than ten years. Thus began what is generally believed to be the darkest of the mostly dark phases of our struggle to survive. General Ziaul Haq took over the country in a mid-night swoop. The act was too petty, weak, also wicked, to be called a coup. Only days before, Gen Ziaul Haq and some of his co-conspirators had sworn on the Holy Book loyalty to the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which they had already planned to overthrow.

As a nation we seem to be congenitally deficient in the instincts that produce remorse, contrition, repentance or shame. We have not felt even a

slight pinch over the loss of more than half of the Pakistan that Jinnah gave us. Riding on that infamy, entered Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It has been all but confirmed by those who were close to the tragic events, that ZAB had decided to be content with only that much of Pakistan that he could rule over till the end of time. The rest of Pakistan was irrelevant and dispensable.

He climbed to the top of this, by then halved, country as the Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) quite in the fashion set by Field Marshal Ayub Khan whom he had wanted to overthrow. This was yet another galling injury to the Quaid's concept of a civilised state. It was further compounded by insult. For quite some time Zulfikar Ali Bhutto remained Chief Martial Law Administrator in the vile traditions set by Ayub Khan and Agha Mohammad Yahya. That position gave him absolute power of which he made inexcusably excessive use until March 23, 1973 when a new constitution reviving parliamentary democracy went into effect.

Did that amount to Pakistan returning to a genuine constitutional, parliamentary democracy such as Jinnah would have approved?

Alas, that was not to be. Within days of the birth of parliamentary democracy under a constitution, the author of that story started nibbling away at the provisions that were the soul of the projected parliamentary democracy for Pakistan. At that moment in our history, this nation saw the constitution compromised and disregarded in practice by the government of the day. Now Pakistan was under a cynically arbitrary rule in the guise of a parliamentary democracy. Once again the country was moving inexorably into a catastrophe. Disenchantment over the suppression of dissent gave birth to furious agitation. The ensuing cyclone swept away what of parliament and democracy we had come to have.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government was toppled: ZAB himself was put through the motions of a court trial and despatched to the gallows. How does this scene relate to Jinnah's dream of a constitutional, parliamentary democracy, living and thriving under rule of law?

Gen Ziaul Haq established a record of, among other misdemeanours, telling audacious lies. He did this knowing that he was telling lies to a whole nation and to the world community, too. He had promised to return to the barracks in 90 days. Let us have Zia tell his monumental lie in his own notorious words. In his very first address to the people of Pakistan on July 5, 1977, Zia said:

I want to make it absolutely clear that neither do I have any political ambitions nor does the Army want to be distracted from its professional soldiering.

I was obliged to step in, to fill the vacuum created by the

political leaders.

I have accepted this challenge as a soldier of Islam.

*My sole aim is to organise free and fair elections
which will be held in October this year (1977).*

*Soon after the polls, power will be transferred
to the elected representatives of the people.*

*I give a solemn assurance that I will not deviate from this
schedule.*

This statement has been broken into six parts so that the reader has no difficulty in realising that in one paragraph of this first address, General Zia had made not one but six solemn promises to the nation, which he knew he would never honour. Note also that he was making those promises as a soldier of Islam. He was destined to break each one of these promises in the most atrociously brazen and sinister manner and without a tremor of remorse or shame. About political ambitions he made it absolutely clear that neither he nor the Army behind him had any ambitions. Years later, he was to perpetrate that titanic fraud of a "partyless" election to be followed by another outrage -- a referendum.

What is one to say about Zia's commitment categorically and solemnly made to assert that neither the Army in Pakistan nor he had any political ambitions?

His claim to be a soldier of Islam leaves one speechless and breathless.

His sole purpose was to hold elections in October, 1977. We cannot forget that the same dictator went on to reject elections as incompatible with Islam. In defence of his position on elections, he would often turn round and insist that there is no mention of elections in the Holy Book. Hence elections had no place at all in the Islamic state that he was fabricating. But the same dictator did hold an apology for elections and went on to stage that squalid puppet show of a referendum to give himself a fresh five-year term, this time as the 'elected' absolute ruler over this nation of 130 million people. He had already been in absolute power for just short of a decade.

Note his solemn assurance not to deviate from this schedule: elections in October and transfer of power to the elected representatives. The air over the Pakistan that Jinnah made was still reverberating with those six solemn promises when this self-appointed soldier of Islam began to turn all his commitments into little tissues of lies.

After those shameless lies, Zia recklessly stayed on for more than ten years. Imagine he came for 90 days, stayed on for over ten years -- by one calculation, 4,840 days! Did anyone in Pakistan's history humiliate the name of Islam in such a disgraceful manner? Zia had no intention of leaving because he had obtained, according to his perverse logic, a mandate to stay

on for another five-year term as an "elected" president of the Islamic republic of Pakistan, although there was no mention of elections in the Holy Book as he had read it. Goodness knows, the dictator left only when the angel of death picked him up from the skies. Gen Zia was the embodiment of total negation of all the values that Jinnah cherished and Islam enjoins.

Jinnah was a totally committed constitutionalist. Of the constitution of the Islamic republic of Pakistan, dictator Zia would cheerfully proclaim that to him it was no more than a sheaf of papers that he could tear to bits any moment he liked! He certainly enjoyed tearing up the constitution to bits. He did exactly that over and over again for over ten years. He also relished trampling on it. Imagine this outrage in the state Jinnah founded!

Zia rejected democracy as a form of government and ruled that democracy was contrary to the message in the Holy Book. Is it possible to imagine of a more revolting insult to the founder of the nation? Zia invented his own brand of Islam and slapped it on the nation. Remember, Jinnah had said religion was a citizen's personal affair and the state would have nothing to do with it? Under usurper Zia, the state had little to do with anything other than the faith of its citizens.

After providence intervened to rescue Pakistan from the claws of the savage dictatorship of Gen Zia, we have seen elections held several times. The only result of these sham elections is that the governments have reduced the Pakistani nation to a tennis ball. Only two persons have been playing a series of drawn games in a 'singles' championship. Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif have had all the action, only to be interrupted thrice by president Ghulam Ishaq Khan and once by president Farooq Ahmad Leghari. It has been a particularly unedifying ding-dong spectacle, watched by a cynically abused nation, holding its breath.

We are supposed to believe that these two prime ministers were guiding the nation along the path of parliamentary democracy, as Jinnah had laid out for us. There is no escape from the reality that is utterly otherwise.

Under Benazir and Nawaz Sharif, the parliament was denied even token recognition as the sovereign lawmaking pillar of the republic. Neither of the two cared to respect the parliamentary process. Even in the mostly nominal proceedings by way of window dressing, the two prime ministers could not make it convenient to participate in the parliamentary process in any meaningful way. Seldom, if ever, the proceedings of the National Assembly commenced on the appointed time. Never in our history has the quorum bell had to ring so often and for so long. Neither the Oxford-Harvard graduate Benazir cared to advise her flock to take parliament seriously, nor the Chiefs College product Nawaz could find time to take any notice of the existence of the parliament. Although Nawaz Sharif had all the time in the world for his weekend cricket in his hometown Lahore, 300 kilometres

away from the capital. This he did with religious regularity.

Benazir and Nawaz have always preferred the protected studios of the captive Pakistan Television to communicate with the nation, as and when either of them thought he/she had anything to say. Even this was not very often. Never was the floor of the parliament used by these prime ministers. Both of them were twice in office and twice dismissed for grave wrongdoing. Strictly speaking, Nawaz Sharif has been prime minister three times, twice dismissed as he was by president Ghulam Ishaq Khan!

Our tragedy deepens when it is realised that the restoration of 'democracy' after the demise of dictator Ziaul Haq has brought only more ignominy than ever before. In around ten years, this nation was put through three general elections. It had to witness the appalling pantomime of individuals engaged merrily in the prime ministerial musical chairs. Benazir Bhutto has held the position of prime minister of Pakistan twice, only to be dismissed twice on charges of grave wrongdoing. Nawaz Sharif has had the distinction of being dismissed three times. Each time he, too, was charged with irredeemable misdemeanours.

This series of quick elections brought no benefit. Let us remind ourselves for a moment that we have been going through the inane and barren motions of elections. The hideous irony is that all dictators have held elections. Note: Ayub held elections; Yahya held elections; ZAB held elections. Imagine even the worst of them all, Zia held elections. Where did we end up after those sinister and abominably hypocritical gestures to democracy and parliamentary form of government? The worst part of this pathological hypocrisy is that we have been deceiving no one -- only ourselves and our children!

This disagreeable chapter does not end here. After the Dark Age of Zia dictatorship we move into another phase of disreputable series of elections. Ghulam Ishaq Khan held two elections. Farooq Leghari, too, held elections. In between these elections we had two visits from Benazir Bhutto as prime minister. An equal number from Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif. Do not forget other governments and other prime ministers in this very phase. Count the caretaker prime ministers -- 1, Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi; 2, Moeen Qureshi; 3, Sardar Balakh Sher Baz. Mazari; 4, Mian Meraj Khalid. Only governments changed, nothing else, unless we insist that deterioration is also a kind of change.

One wonders in stark dismay why even the catharsis of the electoral process does not help this republic break out of the haunted prison of politics gone putrid. Those who had hoped that the end of the longest dictatorial rule would bring a new dawn are simply aghast. Nothing ever gets better in Pakistan. One reason is that we remain totally unable to distinguish between transparently clear democracy and dark and dense oligarchy. The changes in

government up to October 27, 1958 were essentially democratic. Since that date all changes have been fiendishly immoral. It is uneducated to talk of all this in terms of politics. What has gone wrong should by now be absolutely clear. We are in a state that is nothing short of moral turpitude. Whatever we have by way of politics is a process that unfailingly throws up persons who are blithely wallowing in moral decay, and enjoying it.

Between the benighted careers of Benazir and Nawaz Sharif lies a chapter that has recorded not only an abysmal decline in the quality of political life but a horrifying disintegration of the moral fibre of the nation. Today Pakistan is rated among the most corrupt countries of the world. How can we defend ourselves against this charge when we take a look at what we really are. Our banks and other financial institutions have been plundered so comprehensively that all of them are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

There is little with which to defend ourselves against the charge of being among the most corrupt. From 1958 when the first dictator took over the country, we have witnessed the depressing spectacle of senior government officers being thrown out of service by the hundreds. All on the charge of being corrupt. Field Marshal Ayub threw out 303; Gen Yahya booted out 313; Zulfikar Ali Bhutto swept more than a thousand into the dust bin; Gen Zia also made short work of hundreds. A society harbouring so many hundreds of dangerously corrupt government servants in very senior position, and cohabiting with them, has a great deal to think and worry about. Are we thinking? Or, worrying? If you go by the way Benazir and Nawaz have enjoyed their prime ministerial innings by turns, it would appear that we have come to relish what the rest of the world sees as corruption of the most pernicious and demeaning kind imaginable.

Some of the leading lights of the Benazir camp, as also of the Nawaz Sharif camp, have been repeatedly declared bank loan defaulters. The sums of money they are alleged to owe the banks run into hundreds of billions of rupees. This was money that belonged to the people -- the depositors. Hair-raising are the figures that are being quoted to quantify Pakistan's wealth that has been siphoned out of the country and stashed in foreign banks. A modest estimate puts this figure to several times that of the total foreign debt of Pakistan.

On the count of human rights, Pakistan's place is at the bottom of the world. All that we have to show in terms of the rights of children (specially the girl child) is a big black spot. Unspeakable is our record on the rights of women. It cannot be otherwise in a society that lives with 'honour killing' and karo kari. Our jails are bursting at the seams with prisoners awaiting trial and may not get an opportunity to defend themselves for many years.

Benazir Bhutto has run away from the country. She has been officially declared absconded. Several cases for corruption against her are pending in

the courts of Pakistan. Her husband is also in detention on similar charges, including alleged involvement in manslaughter. Nawaz Sharif is doing scarcely better. He is facing many charges, again of very grave nature.

This, in brief, is the record of Pakistan that Jinnah made. Where is the point in this pathetic record that one might see as offering some relief from anguish, or consolation from agony? It is irredeemably sable in the context of the commitment to the polity of democracy in the parliamentary form. Jinnah was uncompromisingly for this form of culture. Pakistan has betrayed that culture, choosing a lifestyle that is an affront to Jinnah's principles and ideals.

Jinnah was in the limelight of politics of this vast sub-continent for a very long time. His commitment to his principles admitted of no concessions, let alone compromise. He was a man who earned his living by dint of his professional work and skills. No feudal or Wadera he. Jinnah was a worker quite as millions of us are. Jinnah's principled politics was bound to create 'situations' for him. Very often he was in the eye of the storms engineered by his detractors. His profession of law, too, was one that could encounter inclement weather and did often enough. As a practising lawyer, and in the thick of relentlessly controversial political contention, he was certainly a man of the world, as they say. But of impeccable integrity, often in the most demanding circumstances.

He lived a very full life. Throughout he was a self-made man. Few of his contemporaries commanded as awesomely strong a reputation for being incorruptible as Mohammad Ali Jinnah. He lived in a rather hostile world. His foes were powerful, his friends not so formidable. For such an upright and unbending politician and a professional living under the gaze of unforgiving critics and fault-finders, to have so masterfully commanded a universally accepted and respected reputation was an attainment only just short of superhuman.

What is the reputation of the country he made? For many years, Pakistan is rated among the most corrupt in the world. There have been periods when the country that Jinnah the incorruptible made, ranked as the most corrupt in the world.

If this is not the most brazen, brutal and persistent betrayal of Mohammad Ali Jinnah what else can possibly be, pray?

In the pages that follow resides an album of snapshots of our corrupt, debt-ridden and disreputable existence today. Each little snapshot of our life today is a rank betrayal of the principles and values that Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, cherished and never, never compromised. It is admitted that this is not a complete or comprehensive portrait.

The intention here is not so much to surprise the reader, as to add to the pervasive melancholy. Not music, but melancholy is the food of our love.

We live on -- somehow. We thank goodness for being alive and in our homes. Thousands are most probably in some police lock-up or prison without being charged, and without any hope of release in the near future. Such then is what we have made of the state Mohammad Ali Jinnah founded. Few leaders of men have been so savagely betrayed as the Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

-A B S J

Karachi,
December, 1999.

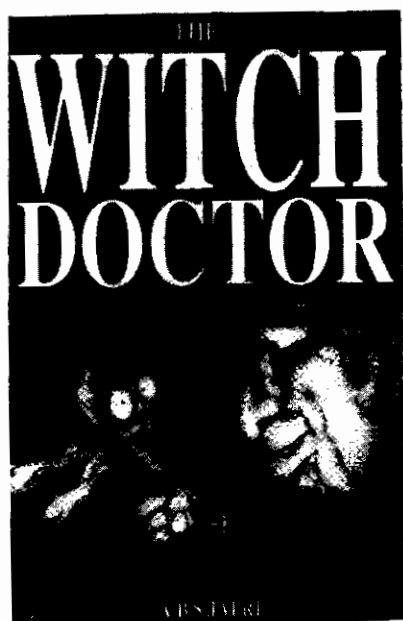
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* As was most appropriate to the occasion, the Quaid-i-Azam defined the IDEAL of Pakistan in his very first formal address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947. Of the IDEAL he said:

"Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our IDEAL and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, but in the political sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state."

** This is easily available. Interested reader should have no difficulty in laying their hands on the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

*** See Appendix: Traitors Gallery.



(October, 1993)

Why this book?

From August 6, 1990 to July 15, 1993, the people of Pakistan traversed what has been perhaps the most traumatic and chastening patch of their journey on uncharted and stormy seas. It was traumatic because the people were systematically wounded and humiliated by a President arbitrarily using the artillery left behind by the worst dictator in this country's history strewn with military dictatorships. Chastening because during these years, thanks to a relatively relaxed Press, the people were told a good deal that was eye-opening and enlightening. Besides, adversity is, after all, a good teacher.

For a variety of reasons two persons stand out. One, (former) President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. At eighty years of age, he conducted himself with persistent recklessness which has no parallel in the history of even Pakistan, parading more military adventurists than any other in our times. The other character has been Ms Benazir Bhutto. With the advantage of aristocratic birth and the best possible upbringing and education, BB gave an account of herself which mocked at her priceless assets.

Ghulam Ishaq Khan was first christened Baba in public by Benazir Bhutto,

herself better known as BB. Baba and BB together made history of infinite variety, and immense agony for the nation. They started off on the wrong foot. Baba would not like her to be the Prime Minister of Pakistan although she headed the largest single political element in a directly elected National Assembly. When he relented, it was with much distaste, of which he made no secret. After 20 months of searing antagonism, Baba ditched BB in a manner which could hardly have been more heartless and comprehensively vindictive, taking her husband in his sweep. Fragments of that piquant story are scattered all over the pages that follow.

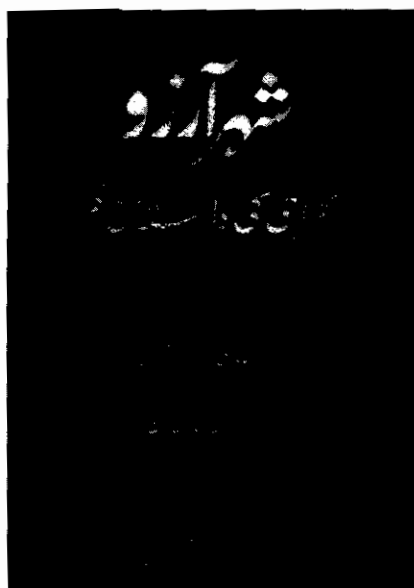
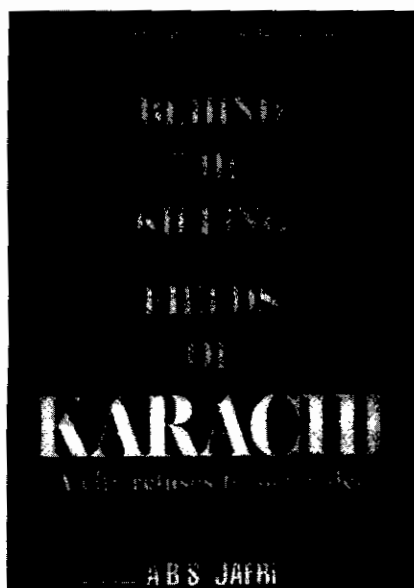
For her part, BB has put up a performance which is, in its own depressing way, a marvel of shifting positions, juggling with commitments, playing hide and seek, befriending enemies, antagonising allies, suddenly taking off on long foreign tours, establishing contact with the most weird political characters across the globe, selling out to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund the soul of the party which her own father had founded on progressive, egalitarian foundations.

Baba and BB have virtually co-authored a unique chapter in the history of Pakistan. It is a saga of politics unburdened with any abiding commitment, uninhibited by any regard for the spirit of the Constitution of the Republic.

Baba and BB shared an uncommon genius for making politics a matter purely of personal convenience and advancement. The contents of this volume can quite appropriately be taken as the writer's humble tribute to both.

—ABSJ

Islamabad,
October 1, 1993.



(October, 1995)

Why this book?

THE style of government in Pakistan has undergone a qualitative change since Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder, set up the first seven-minister cabinet. It was a government committed to some values which were pretty neatly defined in the sub-conscious perceptions of the entire nation. Karachi at that time was an orderly, neat, clean and civilised nation. Although there were titanic problems to be faced, and were being faced bravely, the infant nation was at peace with itself. The government had a fair idea of what was to be done and it was earnestly doing it.

The government which we have today (as the governments we have had over the past three decades or so) is composed of a totally different material. It is quite as outrageously cumbersome and corrupt as the original cabinet was sleek, manageable and clean. The ministers in that government were upright men; the policies they sought to pursue were people-orientated. After that for a whole generation, the governments in Pakistan have been essentially unrepresentative (regardless of their civilian garb or military outfit) and anti-people.

Pakistan is now being ruled by a closed and largely corrupt coterie of some 200 families. (See page 389) Most of these people are feudals; those who are not exactly feudals are men of fabulous fortunes which would need more than a little explaining. These families have their hands on the levers of State power even when for all appearance they are in the opposition or just out of power. The latest Punjab cabinet, cobbled together by the combined wisdom of the ruling families, presents an authentic picture of the perverse power structure of contemporary Pakistan.

When this be the chemistry of State power, there is little chance for political decency to survive. The only objective of political activity in Pakistan today is to grab power, and instantly thereafter, grab public wealth. One of the very first acts of the members of the National Assembly and the provincial assemblies after 1993 general elections was to sanction themselves hefty salary increases and enhancement in allowances and perks. This is not simple audacity. It is compounded by a contemptuous disregard of public opinion. This is as good as saying: "the people may go to blazes."

Never in the history of Pakistan was the citizen, the human individual, subjected to such humiliation and torment as in recent years. Reports of reputed human rights monitors (national as well as international) insist that Pakistan has notched up a record which is disreputable. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) described 1994 as the "darkest year in recent history". This was before torture and deaths in custody became something of a routine in Pakistan. In Karachi, in particular.

There have been precedents in earlier years also but of late the tendency to accuse political opponents of being Indian agents, instruments of the notorious Indian secret service RAW, is established State policy. If one were to take due note of these accusations, the whole of Karachi's 12 million people are either Indian agents, or the agents of Indian agents. All notable political figures have been accused of being enemy agents at one time of their career or another. This amounts to injecting a murderous element in the nation's political activity. (See page xxv)

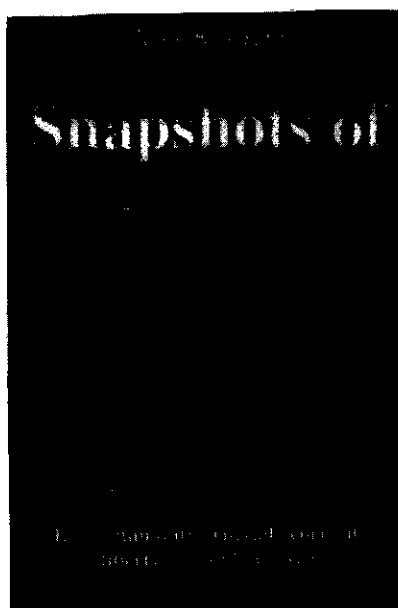
THE experiences of the citizens of Karachi need the critical attention of unbiased observers. Political, legal, moral values are being undermined, flouted, defiled and vandalised with a recklessness which defies belief. What we have on our hands in the country, again in Karachi in particular, is a deliberate brutalisation of public administration, of politics and of life in general. Innocent and harmless citizens get killed "like flies by wanton boys", to borrow a Shakespearean expression --- only for effect. The President is reported to have taken note of the widespread outrage over the wantonness of the forces of law and order. Not much can be expected by way of improvement because these wrongdoings are actually command performances.

Jinnah betrayed

This book is a direct and a kind of raw response to an exceedingly raw situation which has been prevailing for quite some time. For the moment, only the past half decade has been brought under focus. The book is almost entirely a catalogue of facts, of events as they have occurred. There is very little of comment. Opinion expressed is based on incontrovertible evidence presented. The facts collected in this book speak for themselves. Even in silence, the bare truth is deafening, harrowing. The truth must be told. Hence this book.

-A B S J

Monday, October 30, 1996



(July, 1997)

With no apology

THE Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) described the year 1994 as the "darkest" from the point of view of disrespect for, and cynical violation of human rights. In its report for the following two years, anyone could perceive that the HRCP had just run out of adjectives to capture the ever deepening darkness of the prospect. In several respects, the year 1996 turned out to be bristling with incidents which can only be described as utterly shameful for any country pretending to be civilized at the turn of the 20th century.

What this nation went through in 1996 would be incredible for all normal human beings, except of course for those unfortunate people who had to endure that hell as a matter of personal experience. We saw not only violation of human rights but crass violation of the normal laws of the land. Even the constitution of the republic was not spared. The superior courts came under oblique sniping and, on occasions, all but direct flak. The jails in the country started bursting with prisoners, most of them held without even the pretence of any process of law. People started disappearing, mostly youths

and adolescent. Deaths in police custody became a daily affair. So also in the so-called 'encounters' with the police. Sick prisoners, on the verge of death, were presented to the nation in bar fetters. The limit was crossed when a dead body was delivered to its family with bar fetters on!

In a climate of such savagery (ostensibly sanctioned by law) this nation saw the shameful phenomenon which has come to be called extra-judicial killings". By the police, and its allied agencies, of course.

The ultimate in this line of rape of law and human values was the unbelievable drama just outside the fabled house – the 70 Clinton, the Bhutto home. Seven persons were shot dead in what a high level judicial tribunal of inquiry has found to be "extra-judicial killing" by the police, quite possibly under orders from higher government authorities. Among the dead, and most probably the target of the "extra-judicial killing" engagement, was the sitting prime minister's own younger (and the only surviving) brother. When this crass denial of security of life – and the right to life – was to be the lot of the prime minister's brother, the kind of respect for life and the sanctity of law that existed in the country can better be imagined than described.

Security of life has been the most conspicuous aspect of the year – conspicuous by its absence. Snipers killed people in the streets, at will and with total impunity. Few of such killers could be apprehended, and almost none brought to book. An extra dastardly dimension to killing was added with the rising number of what were mass murders perpetrated by killers inside the prayer halls of places of worship: mosques, imambargahs, churches. Seldom, if ever in our history, non-Muslim minorities were so cynically targeted by marauders and murderers. Churches were not spared. Christian citizens of this Islamic republic were subjected to terror and killing. Many more slaves were found in secret bonded labour camps (mostly in Sindh). Some were rescued, not without some disgusting experience. Among these wretched people quite a few were members of the Hindu minority community.

But even all that does not complete the 1996 calendar of shame. Injustice, insensitiveness, indecency have been the remarkable features of the culture that reigned in Pakistan during 1996. Corruption stood out as the emblem of the nation, and the logo of the government which quite deservedly earned the distinction of being the Second Most organisations were virtually crippled, and public service institutions were teetering on the verge of collapse. Hypocrisy and dissembling have been the 'done' thing.

The Snapshots of Shame 1996, adds up to a portrait which should, first, put the whole nation to shame. Then it should awaken the nation to the degradation which has set in its psyche as its second nature. Today we are a people almost completely debased, brutalised, dehumanised and reduced to irredeemable cynicism. We are insensitive to even filth, trash and pollution

Jinnah betrayed

of every kind, from physical to emotional to spiritual. We are a wreck. We are not capable of even feeling ashamed. Few nations have revelled in self-abuse with such shamelessness as we have throughout 1996.

Take a look at these snapshots, and ask yourself the simple question: are we human? My answer is in the negative, an unqualified negative. In our present state we are not human, most certainly NOT!

-ABSJ

Thursday, July 31 1997



Three tears for Quaid-i-Azam

Around December 25 this nation goes through an agonising experience of self-assessment. This exercise in groping through the dim corners of conscience leaves the honest in a state of trauma, laden with shame. We have a raging conflict between the Quaid-i-Azam who founded this state, and those who have been ruling (ruining?) it. This hits the eye in the chamber where our lawmakers sit and do, what they do, as the Quaid looks down upon them.

Even the most moderately educated among us knows that as a lawmaker, the Quaid was a model of wisdom, dedication, decorum and integrity, intellectual as well as personal. He was a towering parliamentarian. A practising lawyer of the highest class. A politician of unrivalled skill and impeccable credentials.

Let's take wisdom, first. Look around. Any trace of this virtue on our political horizon from one end to the other? Of dedication? How many of our legislators have stayed loyal to the party and the leader they started their career with?

Oh, don't mention decorum in the context of our parliamentary culture, No!. Young lawmaker Mohammad Ali Jinnah set the rules of etiquette, parliamentary etiquette. All those established rules, conventions and traditions have been trampled upon by our lawmakers. This statement can be faulted -- only for being the understatement of this now dying 20th century.

Of integrity of any kind, the less said, the better. Less than two days before the National Assembly was scheduled to meet, the president of this Islamic republic slapped on the nation a basket of our ordinances! Had the Quaid been alive, he would not have survived the shock of such affront to the nation's sovereign lawmaking body.

The fact that the president who put his signatures to the abruptly delivered bunch of ordinances is himself a senior jurist and a retired judge of the high court, does not in any manner extenuate the offence one little

bit. Nor does the fact that the law minister, the architect of this unconscionable solecism, is a senior lawyer and a barrister to boot, mitigate the horror.

Between what the Quaid did when he was a lawmaker, and what our lawmakers do day in and day out, there is a world of difference. Let alone the finer points, our lawmakers don't show the elementary manners by starting their day's work on time, as our children in their nursery classes always do.

Our lawmakers in the parliament generally don't. Time and again they have had the nerve to increase their own allowances and perks, without ever thinking of raising the standard of their performance.

Pakistan of today is as distant from the ideals of the Quaid-i-Azam as absolutely right is from utterly wrong. The founding father prescribed three disciplines: Unity was first. Unity of the state, unity of the nation, unity of ideals. The first unity we undermined with our own hands. More than half of the Pakistan the Quaid, made and gave us for safe keeping, is not there. Nor is there any regret about the injury to Unity.

Within the post-dismemberment Pakistan, unity is conspicuous only as a value under increasing stress. The Council of Common Interests, is more a body of interests that are not always easy to reconcile. The National Finance Commission produces formulations that remain clouded with ambiguities and inconsistencies. Amicable sharing of the Divisible Pool is becoming an ever receding dream. There is no unity on census results.

Now, discipline. It is a withering virtue. Witness the proceedings of the lawmaking houses in the country: federal as well as provincial. It is the same disheartening story down the line.

From University level to the primary school level, discipline is what does not meet the eye. How about thousands and thousands of "ghost" schools? We have a relentlessly burgeoning tribe of "ghosts."

Just take a glance at the "ghost" bank accounts. Also at the "ghost" co-ops. Do not fail to note the "ghosts" who have taken away hundreds of billions of rupees from the banks and the development finance institutions.

All kinds of banks are in bad health, notably the Agriculture Development Bank and the Industrial Development Bank. On a smaller scale, the House Building Finance Corporation.

This cornucopia is admittedly disjointed. No wonder. About us today, what is not out of joint?

Thursday, December 24



Oh, these innocents in our prisons

A citizen of this Islamic republic, Munir Shah by name, has just been rescued from a Karachi jail where he spent 12 years without being charged, tried or convicted of any offence under the laws of this state. Some smart police officer picked him up, wrote out an FIR (No 437/88) under Section 13(d) of the Arms Ordinance for "being in possession of illicit arms". This is a familiar enough charge, if you please.

And so Munir Shah was sent to prison to languish there for as many as twelve ghastly years of unrelieved distress.

Then what happened? Nothing happened. Munir Shah was never produced in any court, let alone convicted of any offence. Why? Because, Munir Shah was a nobody, and the police officer was above the law. How else can one explain this outrage? The officer dumped one human being into the prison and then forgot all about it. Most probably he found something more worth his precious while to pursue.

Granted there is nothing out of the ordinary about what happened to Munir Shah. Thank goodness, he is at least alive. Think of those who never emerge in one piece and alive from similar experiences? People die in police custody, or as we are told, kill themselves when in the protection of the forces of law and order. Do we not hear of those who are blithely despatched to the Hereafter in what are fashionably called 'encounters?' Naturally, nothing is heard of them thereafter. Why? Because nobody is interested, not even you, good reader. Not I, to be dead honest. If we were, we should be doing something. We are not.

It would be pointlessly sentimental to get worked up about what has come to be accepted as part of life in our country. After all, are we all not born to die some day? Somehow? Because of some cause, or even without any ostensible cause? So what's so sad about meeting the end in police protection or in a sporting exchange with them in the wide outdoor?

However, there would always be those spoilsports who cannot help fussing about things like human life, and fretting over destruction or mutilation of the lives of innocent fellow citizens. These people ask inconvenient questions. For instance, the question why something cannot be done to go over the case of Munir Shah and identify those officers who all but exterminated the existence of an innocent citizen of this republic?

There is a record of Munir Shah's arrest. Surely, it should be possible to identify the officer who arrested him and caused him to be sent to prison. It should also be possible, if only one tried, to identify the prison officers who accepted an un-convicted, indeed un-tried innocent person as prisoner. And what about the officers who administered the prison where innocent Munir Shah remained a prisoner for 12 years.

Is there no check of any kind in prisons? Evidently, not.

You will be perfectly justified in pointing out that the Munir Shah case is by no means a rare or very unusual incident. Nobody can tell how many Munir Shahs are in our prisons across the country right at this moment. Those who think such thoughts suggest that the number of innocent prisoners is much larger (percentage-wise) in female prisons. What about child prisoners? We do not turn a hair over the thought that adolescents and teenagers can be hanged in our Islamic republic — and actually are.

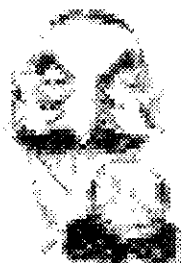
Perhaps one factor — among hundreds — is that not enough noise is made over such tragedies. For the likes of Munir Shah there is nobody in this society to shed a tear. As some friends would point out with their logic of sorts, there are thousands of Munir Shah cases. How much tear-shedding can the most kind-hearted do in single lifetime? So, there would be the police officers, the CIA and FIA and what have you, and then there would certainly be no dearth of Munir Shahs to be sent to prison under the Arms Ordinance — without trial of course.

Governments in Pakistan find court trials such a waste of time. Hence anti-terrorism courts, special courts and speedy courts, apart from the normal courts. And, not to be forgotten — here are 'encounters'.

There is some solid good news for Munir Shah and those who are sorry about his 12 years lost in prison. Just look at the luck and the lot of fellow Pakistani Siraj-ud-Din who has come out of prison after 15 years in prison — all the time without any trial, of course. There is even more consolation for Munir Shah and his maudlin sympathisers. Consider the case of brother in faith Saeed-ul-Haque who spent 28 years in illegal detention in Karachi's prisons. And no complaints.

Quite obviously this has something to do with our sanctimoniously hypocritical morality.

Tuesday, June 22, 1999.



What a fall, Countrymen!

When will we begin to ask ourselves what is wrong with us? Can't we see the obvious: that nothing seems to be going right? Crime continues to rise quite as the government's revenue collection continues to fall. Our parliamentarians are seen everywhere — except in the parliament. Our policemen are everywhere except where the killers are going to strike. Cars are taken away from streets thick with commuters. People get robbed as they emerge from banks.

Not a day passes without reports of wrongdoing in police custody. From torture, to rape, to death — anything can happen in police stations. "Encounters," whatever that should mean, counts for an ever increasing number of fatalities. Courts complain prosecution cases are not properly prepared. Glaring inadequacies riddle investigations. Police officers ignore court summons. If and where inquiries are at all instituted, mountains only yield mice that nobody takes much notice of. Culprits never had it all their way and so well.

Thus it is business as usual, whether it is the income tax office, or the custom post at the border or the police station. Or the thoroughfares and highways. All this in full view of all. Governments have anti-corruption directorates. Yet nothing seems to succeed like corruption. It would of course be ridiculous to suggest that we might try an 'anti-anti-corruption' prescription. All medications are diluted, where they are not adulterated.

It was most probably because of this logic, prime minister Nawaz Sharif thought of the "Ehtisab" strategy to catch the thieves. He may have picked it up from the book of Gen Ziaul Haq, who invented the "Ehtisab first, Intikhab (elections) later." This magic formula was soon to become "Ehtisab first, elections never." What we did not know that he actually intended to forget about both. The dictator got merrily along for longer than any single ruler in this wonderful land.

In our case now, be it noted that the Ehtisab establishment is doing famously. That it has been a great deal more active abroad than at home,

only demonstrates its international outlook and orientation as befits us on the eve of the 21st century. The Ehtisab chief is after the fat cats who wisely store their treasure overseas. Meanwhile, the mice at home, have been given a long rope. Once the fat cats have been caught and delivered to the mills of justice to be reduced to pulp, there would be time to go for the small time players. Like the bank loan defaulters, tax dodgers or the highwaymen. To name only a few.

Let us now think of the other side. The world is not looking the other way. We now have a Universal Declaration on Corruption, adopted in what is now the capital not only of the United States but the whole world. Around 90 nations have signed this new document which is destined to start writing the daily diary of at least some of the more remarkable exploits of free-wheeling types like we are.

Our lifestyle has now come to be seen as CORRUPTION in Government. The consensus is that this aberration has made life miserable and wretched for a large majority of the human race today. If 90 national governments saw their way to converge and put their heads together to do something about corruption in government, this tendency must have become something of an international epidemic. Going by our own experience, we can say it is lethal.

As a country among the most corrupt in the world, we know that this curse is Public Enemy No 1. One can guess what the present prime minister, or any of his so many predecessors, would be impelled to say. Still, make no mistake. Corruption at such prodigious scale as is rampant around us, is not possible without full and enthusiastic participation of the government of the day, whatever its colour or chemistry.

As identified by the Universal Declaration on Corruption, 1999, signed in Washington on Saturday, February 27, corruption in government harms nations in many ways. Some of them: 1) accelerates crime; 2) hurts investment; 3) stalls growth; 4) bleeds national budget; and 5) undermines faith in our freedom. All five indications are strongly visible in our state.

What is even more pernicious than the five enumerated above is that corruption in government undermines and threatens to destroy our self-respect. It has the effect of degrading, degenerating, debasing, dehumanising and finally brutalising perfectly decent and normal people. We should not fail to see that all these symptoms are mocking us today.

The Transparency International discovered this devastating truth about our moral decay three years ago. It would not be too soon for us to wake up and see what we have made of ourselves — a disgrace that invites the contempt of the world. All of us are part of this shame, are we not?

Sunday, March 28, 1999



We claim another big distinction!

It was only the other day that a spokesman of our Foreign office in Islamabad described a report on the state of human rights in Pakistan, compiled by the United States government as "replete with conjecture, factual inaccuracies and exaggeration." Going by our record, one is persuaded to observe that it is not often that the governments in Pakistan find it advisable to lock horns with the government in Washington.

Perhaps for this reason the FO taunt drew special attention and caused some comment to be made in the national newspapers. The FO was advised to forget the comment officially made by the government of the United States. They all tell invented tales. However, no harm in taking a passing note of the reports that the Human Right Commission Pakistan (HRCP) has been compiling year after year. In these reports the facts put together and brought to light invariably added up to a much more appalling picture than the State Department's compilations.

What a coincidence, the HRCP's report for 1998 too has just been made public. Our FO activists, who were evidently propelled by a rush of patriotic fervour to take up cudgels with the United States, may take a look at it. Only a few of the more awesome features of our HR record last year find a passing reference in what is to follow. This summary is no more than a few samples picked up at random.

Pakistan is the world champion with its "highest rate of award of death sentence... A total of 433 persons, including 49 child-convicts that were awarded the death penalty... The number of convicts hanged during the year was 21... During the 10 weeks of their operation, these (military) courts awarded death penalty to 13, of whom two were hanged" (before these courts were ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court).

"The human rights situation...further deteriorated with a systematic propaganda of the government in favour of summary trials in the name of 'speedy justice'...."

"At least 15 lawyers were killed for providing legal service in cases of sec-

tarian or other nature..."

"The total number of prisoners in the country's 78 jails was 80,800, against a capacity of 46,567. There were nearly as many under-trials in jails as the convicts..."

"In Karachi, 1,178 persons were killed, 825 of them apparently for political and sectarian reasons. Of these 110 were killed at police hands. The death toll included 107 women and 37 children..."

"In all, 566 persons were recorded killed in police encounters, including 395 in Punjab..."

"Official figures for crimes against women in the country put the victims of murder at nearly 2,000, of kidnapping at 4,600 and of rape in excess of 1,400..."

"Of the 888 women killed in Punjab...67 per cent were victims of their own kin... Of the 828 reported women kidnapped in Punjab more than half were minors... Of the 706 rape victims in Punjab, 55 per cent were minors. Also well over half of all victims were gang-raped..."

"Infant mortality was among the highest in the world..."

"In November, the officially reported number on the ECL (Exist Control List) was 1,738, including 56 parliamentarians..."

"At least five persons were murdered for just being Ahmadis...Bishop John Joseph of Faisalabad committed suicide...More than 150 persons were killed in sectarian violence, the bulk of them Shias..."

"Suicides for economic reasons, mostly of unemployment, were far more numerous than in any other single year..."

Pakistan's expenditure on education was 1.6 per cent of the GDP...in Iran 11.9 per cent; in Bangladesh 11.2 per cent, in Nepal 10.9 in Bhutan 10.7 per cent; in Sri Lanka 10.1 per cent; in India 2.1 per cent.

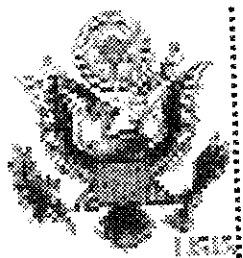
"1,200 of Punjab's rural health centres...were closed for lack of operational needs..."

Let us invite the Foreign Office spokesman to point out "conjecture, speculation, factual inaccuracies and exaggeration" and other flaws in the statistics set out above.

Anyone of us would be mighty happy if the HRCP is exposed for dishing out figments of sick fancy only to malign the fair name of our Islamic republic which our Foreign Office has been projecting to the world and to the people at home, too.

Why must our bureaucrats assume the role of impeccable patriots, carrying the cross when nobody expects them to do anything of the kind?. Frogs in an abandoned well would perhaps have a wider mental horizon than the mandarins sitting it out in the musty nooks of the Foreign Office, spanning out their cobwebs in sterile isolation from the reality around.

Tuesday, March 16, 1999.



Human rights and wrongs

Our Foreign Office has reacted to the report of State Department of the United States about the human rights scene in this country. By itself, this adds up to a welcome reassurance that the usually unconcerned FO is alive to something happening outside its own cloisters, like the publication under reference. Predictably, what the FO has to say is a resounding example of pot calling the kettle black. Or vice versa, if you insist.

The operative part of the FO thesis is that the Amnesty International has provided some powder to have a pot shot at Washington. Being an aggrieved party, Pakistan is quite willing to help itself to such ammunition and quickly settle some scores with HR monitors in the United States administration.

As viewed by our FO wiseacres, the US documentation of HR abuses in Pakistan is "replete with conjecture, factual inaccuracy and exaggeration." Let us not make any fuss on this issue. Granted the FO is dead right. No purpose would be served by nit-picking on details where a margin of bias or deliberate mischief may have compounded genuine human error. The US bureaucrats, like our Pundits, are not above such lapses. That's quits.

We would blithely go along with our FO when it sagely asserts that "after all, the US too has many human rights problems." It certainly has. So has the United Kingdom where only recently the Home Office and chief constable of London Metropolitan Police offered remorseful apologies over the confirmation that racial bias exists and Black Britons are its victims.

But what on earth is our FO driving at? Does the discovery of instances of serious HR abuse cases in US and UK wash our own rather soiled-linen? It would appear to any seriously impartial observer that the FO spokesman has admitted HR abuses in Pakistan the moment he said "...the US too has many human rights problems..."

Now the question that we ought to be addressing ourselves is very simple. In the first place, our concern should be to identify our own failings and to make due amends for them. Whether or not the US too has any human rights

problems is not our problem, and should not be our worry. If the US unwisely chooses to strike postures of self-righteousness, why must we commit the same solecism? Pointing out flaws in US conduct does not in any way convert our vices into virtues.

If the US report is thrice flaws (conjecture, inaccuracy, exaggeration) what do we have to say about the findings of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan? Year after year this highly respectable institution gives the nation gory glimpses of our own soul-searing record on the wanton Human Rights violations that go unpunished. The HRCP reports of the past years have said a great deal more about our diabolical deeds than the US States Department would ever care to unearth and expose our fiendish abuses.

As far as memory serves, this is the first time the FO has cared to enter the ring on the issues related to human rights. It was justified in steering clear of the muddy waters of HR abuses because, in the first place, we have a ministry deaf and dumb dedicated to blindness on human right abuses in our culture. Then, we have the ministry of the interior that has its hands on all the levers and controls that may have any relevance of any kind to human rights. This was FO's first outing on this turf. Why? A bit of a mystery.

One would certainly admire the profound concern the FO has put on display (the first of its kind, mind you) over the discovery of HR abuses in the US. However, we would be better placed if we simply say that HR abuses in Pakistan are the concern of Pakistan, quite as we consider similar abuses in the US are the concern of the US. No further comment.

Perhaps the FO didn't really mean to say what it actually was led into saying on the spur of a weaker moment. It has always been on the strongest wicket when it has chosen to be reticent, and opted to see no evil, say no evil.

The bureaucrats are inherently apt to miss is the basic point in any given human situation. For instance, the unavoidable truth that to err is human. No human society or situation is flawless.

What distinguishes the better from the less good is the capacity to prevent abuses, and a reasonably facile ability to redress wrongs. The United States has those attributes built into its system. You can say the same thing about the UK. Does Pakistan culture too have these safeguards against HR abuses? Does your police spell out the rights of the citizen before it proceeds to execute arrest?

The FO would do well by itself to read some of the recent judgements of the Supreme Court of Pakistan on justice-related matters. The truly wise among us feel they have abundant cause to look inward. Our irrefutably tainted record should give us more modesty and less of mendacity.

That is where this matter had better rest for now.
Monday, March 8.



Long live the Queen!

Nobody was surprised to learn that Ms Benazir Bhutto has been "elected life chairperson" of the Pakistan Peoples Party. That is how the mind of the present PPP works. Let us now take a look at absolutely the first direct and inescapable consequence of this "election." It means that as long as Ms Benazir Bhutto lives — may she live till the end of time — election to the highest position in the Pakistan People Party stands abolished. In the book of those who consider 'election' as an evil that is not even necessary, this nuisance never really had a place. Feudals and Waderas neither fancy nor elections. This word is not in their boo.

Gen Ziaul Haq, had appointed himself the life president but the cunning despot did not make a proclamation to that effect. Even he shied away from embracing in public such an antediluvian vision of holding on to power. What exactly is the logic or political morality of an office for life? Does the holder believe that not until Providence recalls her/him, no person equal to that office is likely ever to appear on the scene?

Unless there is some wholly inscrutable impulse that has inspired the PPP executive, one would be led to infer that the party's leading figures are now in a state of unmitigated despair. They now feel there is no way the party can be redeemed from its misfortunes. So, it must be content with what it has, for the sheer fear that even this may be lost without any hope of anything better coming their way. This must be the ultimate in hopelessness.

That this decision is utterly irreconcilable with the basics of democratic thought and ethos is too obvious to be stated. It should be taken for granted. What needs to be looked into are the causes of such unrelieved despondency in the PPP establishment. Indeed the causes are admittedly very many, Quite a few of them would be described as 'congenital' by the gynaecologists of history.

On hind sight many observers now feel that a party of revolution, born to be led by a self-worshipping narcissus of compelling Wadera instinct, was bound to go astray, and its 'chairman' would be fated to come to shattering grief. This is a chapter that the book human history repeats over and over

again. Those who are not unfamiliar with this side of history would be advised to consider the present chairperson of the PPP as a providentially provided reminder.

Now that Ms Benazir Bhutto has been elevated to life chairpersonship of the Pakistan Peoples Party, how does she propose to celebrate? May be an accession ceremony. May be a visit to some shrines for thanks-giving. May be, a feast for the loyal ones who have created a life chairpersonship (that was not there in the original constitution of the PPP) and installed the only near-divine being available and willing to be deified....

Now that this nation has been conditioned to expect anything with calm resignation to fate, Ms Benazir Bhutto should feel quite fortified to go ahead with a right royal coronation extravaganza. The coronation should be complete with the provision of crown, throne, sceptre, knights, courtiers, chamberlains, subjects, lackeys and beggars. We can be sure that she would not forget the slaves. Without slaves, monarchy of today may be complete, but not royalty rooted in the Wadera culture.

Were it otherwise, were Ms Benazir Bhutto acquainted with the elements of democratic ethos and mores, she would have been appalled and agonised at the slightest mention of a 'life' anything. Life chairpersonship of a party that has been claiming to belong to the people, however hypocritical such claims, would be a revolting and demeaning thought. Those who are congenital optimists had been nursing the belief that BB is, after all, an educated person with at least a smattering of history. Where would they hide their faces now?

Such PPP loyalists are today in a state of pathetic dismay. Can an educated person at the dawn of the 21st century be so benighted as to consider for a split moment any office for life without being totally outraged? Can any principled politician countenance office without the process of open and above-board elective process?

Now that Ms Benazir Bhutto has deemed it meet to become 'life' chief of the PPP, she might proclaim that the office shall be hereditary, the exclusive privilege of the dynasty. Generation after generation, the chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party shall be the duly entitled descendent of the first chairperson — and no other. The Party shall carry the royal standard, regalia and colours.

Where would the people go? Nowhere in particular. They will stay as they are, where they are. They do not deserve anything better. And their lot cannot get worse. So they are in their appropriate place and there shall they remain till this dynasty is on the throne and wears the crown. So, God save the life chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party. The people may now kneel and feel free to pay homage, and presented their humble tribute.

Friday, March 12, 1999



Oh, these three tormentors

A report from London says former prime minister Ms Benazir Bhutto is unlikely to return to Pakistan in the near future. Instead, she is planning to proceed to the United States. Summer is the holiday season in the rich western countries. No harm really, if Ms Bhutto takes some time off while the weather is seasonable.

However, the circumstances surrounding Ms Bhutto's Westward-Ho journey are not so simple. Quarters close to her in London (where she is hibernating at the moment) say the purpose of her trip to the United States at present is to "prepare public opinion." This puts a slightly intriguing complexion on her trip to the US. What public? What Opinion? And where? She may be having a rough time in Pakistan but surely she cannot be entertaining any ideas of playing a role in the US presidential elections. Can she?

If Ms Bhutto has any need to prepare any public opinion, it has to be Pakistani public, its opinion and her own politics in that context. What kind of public opinion can she expect to be "preparing" in the United States and to what purpose? This is not a little mystifying. Her children are outside Pakistan. And she herself on the move — all the time outside Pakistan. Her party is in Pakistan. Also her husband, her home and her future.

Let us be fair to her. If she is haunted by the feeling that "home no more home to me, whither must I wander," it is not difficult to understand. Ms Benazir Bhutto is a young woman with quite a few wounds inside her heart. That most of these wounds are of her own infliction does not assuage the pain. Wounds are wounds. They ache, whatever the cause. But one has to return home, if only to bear the pain. The one lesson exile teaches is that there is no place like home, however inhospitable it might be at times.

There is another Pakistani political leader who is in more or less similar predicament. His should be equally painful. The MQM chief Altaf

Hussain is biding his time on foreign soil. His apprehensions are not very different from what assail Ms Bhutto. Not long ago, when the Bhutto lady was ruling the roost in Pakistan, she was hounding the MQM leader. Her interior minister was moving mountains to get hold of the MQM chief, ostensibly to teach him (Altaf) the lesson of his life.

For the moderately intelligent, life teaches enough of lessons to enable them to live without unnecessarily hurting themselves or others. How very astonishing that the political Caesars in Pakistan happen to be utterly incapable of not only learning but also unlearning anything. Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, our present prime minister (for the second time) goes about his job as if he is still a novice, new to the job, the trio working wishfully away on the trial and error treadmill. But in the faith that somehow good shall be the end of it all. Does he remember that first time around, he burnt his fingers? Probably not.

Ms Benazir Bhutto was twice the prime minister. Each time coming to grief, entirely due to her very own characteristic foibles. There is no evidence in her conduct today that she may have been even slightly the wiser for all her harrowing errors, and their fearsome consequences. There is neither remorse, nor repentance. Nor any chastening of style. She has learned little. And she has not unlearned a lot. Imagine, going to the United States to "prepare public opinion".

Mr Altaf Hussain has been a hyperactive player on our stage. Liked, admired, adored, even hero-worshipped with undoubted sincerity. Disliked and feared with equal intensity. He too has been in and out of power, time and again. He has teamed up with all the players from Ziaul Haq to Benazir Bhutto, to Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif. Mercifully, Zia is not around. But Mian Nawaz Sharif, Ms Benazir Bhutto and Altaf Hussain are. No three persons were at such searing odds with one another as these three tormentors of this country are.

Has anyone of them learned anything from the terrible experiences they have had to go through, and the consequences they have had to incur and endure? Is there no forgiving and forgetting in their hearts and in their souls? Do they ever search for the causes of their suffering? And the suffering they have severally and together caused to this nation of 140 million perfectly simple and sincere people?

The answer, alas, is NO.

Thursday, August 19, 1999.

It is democracy Vs corruption

IN principle no sane person would defend any a social contract other than one in which the dignity of the human individual is the primary, the ultimate, and the inviolable value. This cannot be presumed about any martial law dispensation or culture. Period.

Now, to London. An "Action" group of the Commonwealth of nations has threatened to suspend Pakistan from its membership because of what is ostensibly seen as an act of "unconstitutional overthrow" of a democratic government. Goodness me, that's conduct intolerable. Good people of the C'wealth rise!

It is obvious that the 'Action' group were acting on the brief from their governments. Their decision proclaims the uncompromising commitment of the C'wealth to the democratic values, ethos and what have you. Great.

You may have heard good, old Socrates, the father of philosophy, advising his pupils to "define your terms." Upon those three words rests the foundation of all thinking. Evidently, the C'wealth wiseacres have not heard of Socrates and his simple three-word dictum.

Let us follow Socrates. There is no dispute over the definition of democracy. It is claimed that the government "overthrown" in Pakistan was democratic. Very well. Let us see how democratic it was. Not very far from the C'wealth sanctum in London are the offices of Amnesty International. Please ask AI what has been the rating of the late government by the democratic standards.

The C'wealth priesthood should know something about Transparency International. What does the TI say for the three years of the late democratic government? Who put that government among the most corrupt in the world? Anyone can see the inverse connection between democracy and corruption in governance. The more corrupt a government, the less democratic it is bound to be. How democratic is a government that is seen to be among the most corrupt in the world?

By now the C'wealth should have heard of the invasion mounted by a force of thugs and charlatans on the Supreme Court of Pakistan. This was led by the elected notables of the late democratic government. The target was the Chief Justice who was later removed from his position. It was an action in aid of the democratic government now mourned by the C'wealth.

Is anyone out there aware of the Rs 300 billion defaulted loans in the books of the banks under direct government control? Of billions of rupees in taxes that have not been collected because those evading them are political part and parcel of the ruling party? The finance minister had admitted the existence of "underground" economy worth between 1,000 and 1,500 billion

rupees. He had and done nothing about it Why?

What about the government's performance in the context of loans obtained from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the London and Paris Clubs and other lenders? Put all the wrongdoing in the management of the finances alone (there is a lot more to governance), it should be evident that if there was no intervention, the democratic government would have collapsed under the weight of its own sins, creating a crisis of ruinous dimensions.

In an ambience of fearsome regimentation and state violence, there is just no way to get rid of an autocratic regime by constitutional devices. A corrupt government proves that it is not democratic and not removable by democratic process. Those that get overthrown prove they were beyond the democratic process of change and renewal. The removal of the Allende government in Chile would remain a remarkable exception.

This is not in defence of extra-constitutional measures, only to point out that what has been removed was a cancer (not democratic government), calling for instant surgery. For a long time the World Bank and the IMF have been pleading with the former prime minister to improve the quality of governance. Did the C'wealth hear President plead with the outgoing government not to undermine democratic values. Instead adopt 'moderation' in his response to peaceful democratic action? Has anyone any idea of the number of people in jails without trial? Of an elected government and legislative assembly in Sindh province in suspension? Of systematic violence against women? Of bonded labour camps? Of discrimination against religious minorities? Any plea for restoration of such a putrid outfit is devoid of logic.

In Pakistan alone, the Commonwealth have blithely done business with 1) Field Marshal Ayub; 2) with General Yahya who dismembered this country; 3) with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who made military rulers look like saints; 4) with the longest ruling dictator Gen Ziaul Haq, who cynically destroyed the roots of democracy. No nerve was touched then.

As for the timetable for fresh elections, be it noted that the existing electoral rolls are a monumental fraud. It would be naive to suggest that elections be held before the electoral rolls are cleaned up and updated. What all the Commonwealth governments together can do to assist the democratic process is to help the new order with the nitty gritty of the electoral process. Put together, the C'wealth heads can come up with a proper nostrum. Why issue dictates that would make King Canute blush.

Finally, remember, this episode illustrates once again that:

"In a society generally corrupt,
freedom cannot for long exist..."

(-- Edmund Burke, 1729-1797)

Tuesday, October 19.



Rich but robbed all the time !

Assuming that we do not take notice of what is going wrong. Would it set the wrong things right? Would it be a friendly gesture towards anyone in power at the helm of the state? Would burying the heads in the sand help the country sail out of an uncomfortable hole? For the intelligent, the answer is obvious. My country when right; my country to be set right, when on the wrong foot. That is how our sages have defined true patriotism.

Except for good, old Mushahid Hussain Sayed, once priding himself on being a journalist and a former editor of a national newspaper, most people feel not everything is where it should be, or how it ought to be. What is our duty today?

To continue the song and dance? Or stay a while and take a hard look around ourselves? It appears that the economy is not up and about.

Our patrons in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are no longer as forthcoming as they used to be. They have started giving us more of their mind than their money.

More than once, they have told the government about better "governance." It is not often that banks treat sovereign governments to such a sermon -- all of it in public. Our friends in the State Department in Washington, too, have been a trifle too candid for comfort.

Let us take all this sportingly. What comes from old friends calls for patient hearing. What are they trying to suggest? A guess would be in order.

Our banks' bad loans portfolio adds up to more (not less) than 250 billion rupees. This is, if anything, higher than it was when the Nawaz government came in. This should ring an alarm. Its message should be heeded. Is this being done? Apparently, not. The rise in the figure of bad loans tells a pathetic tale about the intentions and effectiveness of the government.

Who has not heard the litany about 'sick industrial units.' With some

thousands in the intensive care, one should suspect some kind of an epidemic. Do we have less of these sick units now than we had three years ago, or more? Perhaps more. This is not a compliment to the industrial health care unit in the PM's secretariat.

In order to lessen the burdens on the government's shoulders, it was decided to sell some public property. Notable on the list has been real estate that belongs to the people of Pakistan. Strange, not many buyers coming forward.

In a moment of supreme self-abnegation, the PM put his own palatial secretariat on the line. Again no buyers. It is no longer strange. Obviously there is not around enough of the kind of money needed for such transactions.

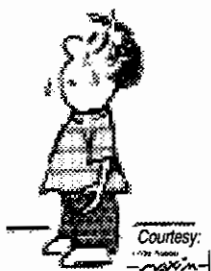
Some people have been talking about Pakistan's wealth in foreign banks. This kind of talk is getting a little louder by the day. Soon after May 28 last year, the (then) finance (later) foreign minister had promised full details of money taken out in the ecstasy of our nuclear triumph. Those details are awaited. Meanwhile, the wagging tongues have been talking of Pakistani cash stashed abroad in terms of 40-50 billion dollars. Give or take five or ten billion. Would it still not be considerably more than 32 billion dollars.

What is this 32 billion dollars? According to Washington Post this is the total debt Pakistan owes to foreign lenders. Now that's what you call incredible! Are we to believe that if only we bring home to Pakistan from foreign banks the money that is Pakistan's, we shall be able to clear the 32 billion dollar debt to the last cent and still have around 10 billion dollars as foreign exchange reserves? Good heavens, Pakistan rupee would shoot like the northern star! If...

If and when this can be made to happen, it will mean 70 per cent of our budget, that vanishes into debt servicing, will be ours and available for say some education, some health, and why not some more for defence. When we recover the banks' bad debts, there would be some 250 billion rupees more in the economy.

When we harness the 'underground' economy worth 1,000 to 1,500 billion rupees, the public exchequer will be richer by around 100 billion rupees in more taxes.

Recover banks loans, revive sick units, bring home Pakistan's money lying abroad, lift 'underground' economy into the open, and we shall soon be home and dry. Fellow citizens this is a rich country -- only robbed to its bone marrow. Is there a way to do the needful? Surely, there would be a hundred ways, if there is a will. Good luck, fellow Pakistanis. Monday, October 11



Now the deserving be damned

Thank goodness, the federal cabinet has, in its wisdom, decided to lift the ban on recruitment to government services in Grade 11 to Grade 15. Be it recalled that the ban on recruitment to Grade 1 to Grade 10 had already been lifted. First of all, let us ask why was the ban placed on recruitment, in the first instance? Ostensibly, the reason was that the nation's economy was under tremendous pressure. Besides, presumably, the government could manage to get along without fresh recruitment.

Naturally, one should like to know has the economy really turned the corner? Take a look at the 1999-2000 budget. Where does one find any evidence of a turnaround? Tax collection is nowhere near being even normal, let alone better. We hear protests against the Sales Tax.

The traders are up in arms against even the nominal fee for Trade Enrolment Certificate (TECs). Direct Foreign Investment (DFI) has disappeared. Remittances from Overseas Pakistanis remain barely above negligible. Exports are in an abyss. Where does one find any suggestion that the economy is any better than what it was when the ban was imposed?

Naturally, many people would ask **why** lift the ban on recruitment? Most probably the answer from the government side would be that the ban in being lifted in aid of the "Poor, the needy and the disabled." It is awfully kind of the prime minister to think of the poor, the needy and the disabled. Even if this be a very new development, this sentiment is laudable, admirable, adorable.

Now, let us take the three specified categories, one by one. For the poor, what you need to do is to get some poverty alleviation programmes. Since when providing government service became a poverty alleviation device? People are recruited to government services on merit and expected capabilities to serve the public, not to be provided

poverty relief. If poverty becomes a qualification for public services, we should soon see public administration turned into a long chain of orphanages and destitute homes. That is not even intelligent charity.

Next in order of the government priorities in this context are the "needy." Would some wise guy in the PM's secretariat please help the distraught citizen distinguish between the poor and the needy.

How is the needy not poor, or the poor not needy? Whether you recruit the poor or the needy, the end result would be the same, the government offices would turn into orphanages and destitute relief camps.

The third class of citizens that are promised special consideration for jobs is the disabled. Who has the heart to grudge any favour to the disabled? With all the sympathy in the world for the disabled brothers and sisters, one remains constrained to point out that government services are not necessarily the best asylum for special citizens. Let there be specialised institutions to take care of the special needs of our disabled brothers and sisters.

It is indeed very thoughtful of the prime minister to spare some attention for the poor, the needy and the disabled. Is there any room for the deserving in public services under the scheme of things presided over by Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif of Raiwind? Is anyone in the seats of power aware of the appalling decline in the quality of government services?

We now stand at a point where foreigners feel free to throw protocol to the winds and publically rebuke us for bad governance. What do we hear from the Transparency International (TI), Amnesty International, not to speak of the State Department of the United States of America about the quality and the wayward tendencies of the government?

What the government services need today is high quality human material. A majority of those who sit in government offices are already disabled in one way or another.

If they are inefficient, as most of them are, are they not disabled? If they are corrupt, as most of them are, are they not disabled? If they remain insensitive to their responsibilities to the people, are they not really and malignantly disabled?

Let us be honest. Is the withdrawal of this ban not actually meant to open the doors to that evil called sifarish to placate the cringing members of the prime minister's "massive mandate." A straightforward reply from the prime minister's secretariat and the PML(N) sanctum is solicited.

Thursday, July15



Wisdom from the street

Prime minister Nawaz Sharif has said that the government "cannot" be brought down by street agitation. He would have been on more solid and hence safe ground if he had said "governments should not be brought down by street agitators". As far as it is a debate whether governments in Pakistan "can be" or "cannot be" brought down by such tactics, our history does not offer categorically clear endorsement for either thesis.

Among the formidable governments that we have witnessed and experienced in this republic, perhaps the most outstanding was the one headed by a mighty field marshal. Just when he felt he was almost irremovable, he ran into turbulence that he alone did not foresee. The earth started shaking under his feet when the doughty Field Marshal was in the tenth year of his reign, — yes reign because he thought he was royal material.

To mark this milestone, his government was celebrating its "Decade of Development." The country was being regaled with deafening song and dance. Radio Pakistan and Pakistan Television were presenting a frenzy of adulation. This was rivalled by the panegyrics in the columns of the clutch of government-controlled newspapers under the National Press Trust banner.

Then something happened. Intoxicated by the fables of its own propaganda — thank our radio and television for that — the government could not read the writing on the wall. It was the rumpus in the narrow streets of the usually sleepy downtown Rawalpindi ("such tactics"), that shook the field marshal off his balance. Before this bemused nation could realise what it was in for, the field marshal and his government had melted into the haze of history. The streets of Rawalpindi (virtually the hometown of the awesome Field Marshal) were to stage much that would break the heart of that once admittedly stolid man.

Then, the nation went through some traumatising experiences that most of us prefer not to allude to in normal political situations. From the ashes

of a second time "truncated" Pakistan, rose, almost phoenix-like, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto with a brilliance that was to keep this nation spellbound for a while. As it appears now, he came like lightning and vanished like lightning. He and his government were also the victim of "such tactics" that Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif has loosely and carelessly dismissed as street disturbances.

Like the Colossus of Field Marshal, the Prince Charming, the Quaid-i-Awam, too was removed as a result of street agitations. Public unrest would be ignored only by those who have not learned their lessons from history, and such recent history as ours is. It was only yesterday that the Quaid-i-Awam held complete sway. And it was only the day before yesterday when Ayub Khan was the lord of all he surveyed.

Why are countries like ours prone to political changes that are wrought only by means that are other than lawful and constitutional? Why governments in Post-Martial Law Pakistan (since the autumn of 1958) change only through extra-constitutional means that have also involved violence and death? The answer is quite simple and also quite clear. It is really tragic that we just do not learn from what is written large on every wall in this Islamic republic.

In a society which does not respect public opinion to determine the prosperity or otherwise of governments, inevitably governments would change through street disturbances. Three examples are in front of us: Field Marshal Ayub Khan, General Mohammad Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In addition to street demonstrations, violence of other sorts also played a part in fashioning these sad episodes.

About the Ziaul Haq interlude in our history, the less said the better. But what has been happening in the post-Zia period again tells the same tale. We have had four governments, three of which just could not survive to complete their constitutional span. If they were not pulled down by "such tactics," whatever tactics proved their undoing, were so devastatingly extraordinary as to be worse than extra-constitutional. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been a witness as well as a victim of the black magic that legality was cynically reduced to.

Let us return to the "tactics" that the prime minister was referring to, that is the street disorders that the Jamaat-e-Islami has made its be all and end all.

Mr Nawaz Sharif is dead right when he chooses to dismiss the JI rum-pus with the scorn that he pours on it. The Jamaat-e-Islami has never won any votes from the people. Its chief has the extraordinary distinction of failing to get elected from his own home constituency. That tells you all you need to know about it.

Saturday, July 31, 1999



Ali Baba's forty and nine more

It was in the early 1950s. Pakistan was very young. It had its sense of honour and humour. Unimpaired and robust. Syed Mohammad Jafri, the adorable man and inimitable poet, was an Information Officer. Khawaja Shahabuddin, the then prime minister's real younger brother, was Information Minister. Jafri lampooned hypocrisy in an exquisitely hilarious manner. His wit did not spare government nor the party in government. He was a government servant. But that would not inhibit him. Everybody loved SMJ. Prominent among his fans was his minister

Jafri was prolific. Verses would ooze out of every pore and fibre of his throbbing being. Embedded in the fluff of his humour would always be pins and needles that would prick the conscience. By the way, for those who may not know, in those days we used to have a conscience, as individuals and also as a state. How strange it sounds today. Conscience!

Why would one be thrown back now to that Jafri and the dead and gone '50s in Pakistan? . True, we do not have much of water and even less of power. But Allah be praised, we do have a minister for both. He has produced a list of VVIPs accused of stealing power. The stars in this list add up to just short of 50.

Again, what has this got to do with Syed Mohammad Jafri, who wrote only humorous poetry to make people laugh? In a situation nowhere near so sordid as what we have on our hands today, Jafri took his world back to Ali Baba and his Forty. The refrain of his piece was:

All the Forty of Ali Baba are now in the Muslim League!

Hain Ali Baba key sub chalees Muslim League mein..

Evidently the party (The Muslim League) is doing better now. It can muster on parade more than forty, indeed considerably more. One short of fifty to be exact. And this is only the first list. And only of power thieves. There may be more to follow. It may be wiser to take this as only the tip of the iceberg. But whatever little we have is dependable. It is official. From the horse's mouth, as they say. The source of this intelli-

gence is about as trustworthy as they come these days in our Islamic republic.

As far as stealing and thieving is concerned, who said power is the only item subject to the play of light fingers in today's Pakistan? On one of his now frequent forays into the countryside, the prime minister discovered irrigation water being pilfered, stolen, robbed. Thieving has so many nuances bearing testimony to our innovative genius.

Water is stolen from canals, from pipelines in the streets, from hydrants, from drains and sewers, and goodness knows from where else. Power thefts, too, testify to our versatility. The really powerful in our country ensure that between the power source and their mansions there shall never be any impediment in the nature of a meter. The same holds good for power supply to the feudal's farm tubewells.

When the former prime minister Mohtarama Benazir Bhutto was the power in Pakistan, WAPDA had gone into television in a mighty big way with that jingle "meray kutchchay puckckay aangan mein bijli..." Ordinary mortals used to wonder what would the poor village peasant do with so much electricity. His first need was a primary school for his child, or a dispensary for the family. With power available, all he would be able to afford would be a light point. And he could do quite as well without it.

Now we know who those power lines were going to the villages for. The feudal and the Wadera need power for air-conditioners, household gadgets and of course the tubewells and the farm machinery. That power was not in aid of the poor with their unpaved floors and leaking roofs. This power, once it arrives in the village feudal's mansion, is consumed with the compliments of the WAPDA. If a meter is installed, it is taken care of by the obliging WAPDA area staff -- to please the feudal and cheat the WAPDA.

Now, does this list of 49 VVIPs mean anything? Not much in itself. If you pick 49 out of a possible company of as many thousand, you have only one-thousandth of the 'wanted.' We may take this as the "physician's sample." Or, say, it's a handful from a heap. Surely, these 49 cannot explain the billions of the WAPDA's missing.

So, where do we go from here? Nowhere. And why anywhere? As Omar Khayyam would say: "Why fret if today be sweet?"
Sunday, April 25



Mourn now for survivors

Unable to find anything worthwhile to do, the Pakistan Peoples Party is now advising the people of Pakistan to observe a "Day of Mourning." This is supposed to be in aid of the people who lost their lives in the cyclone that recently hit the southern belt of Sindh. It is natural for human beings to be sad at the sight of the dead and destruction. Mourning is not out of place. But, the sensible among us would ask themselves -- and the PPP leaders -- Is mourning enough?

No matter how deeply and sincerely you mourn, the dead are beyond recall or retrieval. They are already with their Creator. And for all we know, in a better condition than the lot their serfdom offered them in life. Life under the atrocious Wadera culture is a burden. Who should know that truth better than Ms Benazir Bhutto, herself a Wadera and standard bearer of that Satanic culture?

The PPP chairperson should also know that when natural calamity strikes, nearly hundred per cent of those losing life are the poor, eking out an unsure living in a precariously imperilled environment. All of us know that the floods wash away the villages on the banks. First to be swept away are the huts of the poor. Then their children. Then, the poor tillers of the land themselves.. Ever heard of a Wadera washed away in a cyclone or flood?

If there is an epidemic, it is the poor who are the most vulnerable. They provide the most casualties to disease, being totally undefended. Disease and pestilence do not hit the rich. Famine offers no threat to the Wadera and the feudal. Storms say nothing to the fortresses and bastions of the filthy fat ones.

It may be a rather tough thing to say but sometimes tough things ought to be said. For the poor and helpless, who get swept away in a cyclone or flood, or die in epidemics and famines, the mourning after death, is a cruel joke. The dead, however tragic their death, can do very well without the sham mourning of the ministers in front of the television cameras.

Ms Benazir and her equally good-for-nothing courtiers are free to shed their copious tears.

Think now of the living who are worse than dead in the Wadera mangle. Mourn for the sorrow and suffering of those not yet claimed by either natural death nor by the calamitous wrath of angry elements. They need attention. Their children need succour and care because they have no clean water to drink, not enough of milk nor enough of even the most coarse food, no schools, no playgrounds, nothing to cheer their innocent inclinations. They need homes and hearths. Think of them. And also mourn for them if you have the heart that feels for the suffering of the living.

Mourning will not be totally out of place in certain contexts. For instance, mourning, deep and constant, would be completely in order if it is about the manner the original Peoples Party was first high-jacked and then perverted. Mourning is certainly called for because Ms Benazir Bhutto, and the PPP under her searing shadows, forgot all about her own father's plea for Roti Kapra aur Makan. His was not a mere plea. It was a commitment of honour on behalf of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

Had the founder of the PPP been alive, he would be in profound mourning over the way his much doted upon daughter betrayed his commitment to the people.

Mourning would be perfectly in order if it is for the decline of the Peoples Party that once shook the 'bastions of power' and then made an abject surrender to the same vampires. How can people, who had reposed their trust in the PPP, forget -- or forgive -- that its present leader twice abandoned principles for no better purpose than to hang on to the gossamer shred of power?

Ms Benazir must be a sadly ill informed person if she is not aware of the mourning that has become a permanent part of the soul of those who once believed in the PPP and are now in a dungeon of unrelieved despair -- only because this, once 'daughter of destiny,' turned out to be no more than a nightmarish mirage. Those who followed her are now in the desert where she misled them only to be cynically betrayed and abandoned -- sans hope.

There is a lot of mourning all round. And all of it because of what Ms Benazir has turned out to be. Any politicised mourning about the dead in cyclone-hit parts of Pakistan would be with tears that only crocodiles are known to shed.

Friday, May 28



This is our land of infinite variety

How many Pakistans do we have in this Islamic republic? By definition, it should be a republic rooted in the concept of total equality of all. That is what Musawat is? But, are all of us in all parts of Pakistan truly equal? The answer has to be no. This has been noted and stated over and over again by most of us in all manner of situations. Now there is good reason to return to this point. The Supreme Court has noted a deep discrepancy in the status of citizens. Musawat is what is not the general rule in this Islamic republic.

In population and area (but in no other respect) the Frontier province is the smallest provincial entity. Within the Frontier there were (until lately) three distinct and different establishments, administered by different sets of laws and systems of justice. Now there are four.

There are the "settled" districts. As if the rest are not unsettled.. In these districts the laws of the federation of Pakistan and the Frontier province are in force. Then there is the entity called the PATA (Provincially Administered Tribal Areas). Its administration is different from the administration in the 'settled' districts under the government of the Frontier province. The laws that have validity in the "settled districts" do not apply here.

In the same province, there is the FATA (federally administered tribal areas). Here neither the laws of the Frontier province, nor the laws of the federation of Pakistan apply. Nor does the system of justice follow the norms of justice as applicable to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Although this entity is supposed to be Federally administered, the normal laws of the federation do not command validity in FATA.

As if this was not enough of an outrage against the norms of natural justice, the present government has created yet another entity in Malakand agency. This is so utterly absurd that one is at a loss to define it in civilised public administration terminology. Because the powers that be in Islamabad somehow do not feel very well facing the mullahs in

Malakand, they have chosen to capitulate to the agitators. The result is that there is no law in Malakand as we understand law to be.

Neither in the PATA, nor in the FATA, nor in Malakand are the laws and concept and system of justice the same as in the rest of this Islamic republic. This, if you please, is our record on the concept of Islamic Musawat?

Now the Supreme Court has ruled that the citizens of Pakistan residing in the Northern Areas be given the same rights (and presumably, also the same duties) as the rest of the citizens have under the laws of the Islamic republic. Why not? The government has six months in which to do the needful. That is a long enough time, if there is the will to act. The FATA has a fairly big contingent of the honourable members in the National Assembly. They enjoy the same rights and privileges as the other MNAs. That is up-front. Behind the scenes they are a specially pampered lot. Why? Because by tradition they vote solidly for the government of the day -- regardless. Every government in Islamabad finds this a solid asset that must be nursed, pampered, cajoled and on no account discomfited.

The FATA block participates in making the laws of Pakistan. But the same laws have no force in FATA. And yet the FATA is a federally administered Tribal Area. How awfully ridiculous can you get!

This is the pattern of affairs that the East India Company initially set up early in 19th century to deal with the frontier tribes while they were fighting three Afghan wars, and losing are of them. Pakistan inherited this pattern. One of the first decisions made by the Quaid-i-Azam was to withdraw troops from forward cantonments because Pakistan had no reason to maintain an imperial hold on the people in the tribal areas. All of them were Pakistanis like all the rest.

Subsequent governments retained the imperial legacy because by keeping the tribal people in their medieval apolitical environment, the rulers are assured of a solid block of votes. For the bureaucracy, imperial administration is a mine of money. Most of the government spending is largely un-audited, being "Political" in nature.

The political leaders of the Frontier do not wish to end Draconian dispensation because all of them are feudals and inheritors of the devious imperial legacy. On this issue all political vested interests are at one. Ever heard any Frontier politician complain of feudal stranglehold over the Pathan people?

Sunday, May 30



Let us ask: are we human?

On Friday (Jumatul Mubarak), March 19, 1999, this happened in the Islamic republic of Pakistan, province Punjab, district Multan, Tehsil Chunian, Chak No 147/10-R: All five of a family murdered. Nothing to write home about. This sort of thing is not at all unusual in our republic.

Not long ago, 17 were murdered in a graveyard in Lahore, in broad daylight. Not very long ago, in the same Lahore, 12 of a family were massacred around mid-day. Two days later more than a dozen were slaughtered in neighbouring Sheikhpura. And we can go on, and on and...nothing unusual. This kind of thing keeps happening. We take it in our stride as we take the Jugga Tax. Or the Tariq Aziz Show. Why forget weekend cricket of prime minister Nawaz Sharif?

Our tolerance for blood-spilling is indeed phenomenal. We are all equally insensitive to injustice, cruelty, inhumanity. Even with this prodigious capacity to lap up blood and tears, it would be hard not to be shaken to our very bone marrow by the diabolical slaughter of last Friday in that village in Multan.

To those who may have a moment to spare, let it be pointed out that in the slaughtered family there was one widow, three orphan girls and an orphan boy. Those murdered in cold blood were then hacked to pieces. They were:

Sakina Bai (45), mother; Zaitoon (17) daughter; Naeem (13) son; Naheed (12) daughter; Rabia (8) daughter.

Day in and day out, we are flooded and submerged in the claptrap dished out by the heartless tribe of sermon-mongers. They unleash their barrage of humbug from every pulpit and platform. And we suffer all this gibberish. Our radio and television are incessantly bombarding us with so much of divine wisdom. What do we have to show for all this hypocritical harangue?

The books tell us that our Holy Prophet (PBUH) had a very special corner in his concerns, sympathies and affection for the friendless. Specially for the widowed woman and the orphaned child. We pretend to be the followers of that greatest of human beings ever. How much do we love the unprotected, forlorn widow in our surroundings and neighbourhood? What concern do we honestly feel for the orphaned child, left in the lap of a lonely widow?

Murder we take as something that happens and will continue to happen. It does not get registered in our consciousness. Even multiple murder does not induce any ripple in our general sensibility. But this is a case that leaves one on fire, or sometimes dazed and frozen. It would perhaps depend from individual to individual. This murder must shake us all, one way or another.

Those killed are gone. For all we know, it is just as well for them to have joined their Creator before much worse would most probably have happened to them in this Islamic republic. What would this heartless culture hold for orphaned girls on the brink of youth?

One is shattered to visualise what this society -- inhuman as it now is at the core -- usually has to offer to the fatherless and friendless orphaned girl. Not to be ruled out is abduction and rape, or the hatchet or bullet from her own parents -- "honour Killing.". Another moment of thought on this point, and you are plunged into a sea of unmitigated scare and shame.

Those five now sleep the eternal sleep. One might even say that "after life's fitful fever" Sakina Bai and her daughters sleep well and in safety. They are beyond the reach and grasp of the wolves who determine the values of this benighted culture. Just think of the thousands of Sakinas in our midst for whom the same fate is waiting.

For so many of orphan girls in their teens in our society more or less the same fate may be waiting to blight the bud of their youth, or extinguish either their life or their will to live. This thought is enough to devastate a human heart. Did anyone mention a human heart? In this land? Is there any such thing around us?

There is only one question we ought to be asking: Oh Pakistanis, are we human?

Saturday, March 20



Free citizens or freebooters?

What kind of a people are we becoming? Revenue collection of the governments -- federal as well as provincial -- is constantly falling. At the centre, the government has had to scale down the revenue target more than twice. Even so, the collection in the first two quarters of the current fiscal year is much lower than the law of averages would require. After all, there are only three quarters in a year. In the two we have remained way behind the winning post. This is not good.

There has been such widespread and loud rumpus over the Sales Tax. This was to be recovered from the retail trade. The Tajir community have been up in arms against General Sales Tax. So far, the government has been yielding ground. The Tajir fraternity have won every round. Let it be noted that this ST will actually to be paid by the consumer, not the retailer. Even so, the trading community -- the retailers -- would have none of it.

The current year was to see the inauguration of a soft, almost negligible, tax on farm incomes. This is said to be a provincial tax. All the provincial governments have expressed inability to enforce this tax. Here it needs to be noted seriously that wealth produced in the urban sector (industries, trade, commerce, services) is taxed fit and proper. Wealth produced in the rural sector remains largely untaxed. Is this fair?

In our country most of the wealth produced is in the rural (agriculture) sector. A heavy bulk of it goes into the pockets of the feudal lords and Wadera class. They refuse to pay anything to the public exchequer. And they get away with this kind of attitude. Is this not a form of "anti-state" activity? If you refuse to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, you are acting contrary to the interests of the republic. If the urban industrialist fails to pay the taxes he can be hauled up by the state. If the feudal does the same, he goes scot-free.

Why the government feels too feeble to get hold of the feudal to pay a fair tax on his farm income? The answer is obvious. The feudal enjoys a formidable weightage in our political power dispensation. Almost 90 per cent of our lawmakers have emerged from the rural feudal class. They have everything their way. And they mean to keep it that way.

The rural feudal and Wadera actually believes he is the lord of all he can survey. The Waderas owe the WAPDA millions of rupees for power drained stealthily out of its distribution network. But they would not pay full dues. The prime minister himself has identified cases of theft of water by the feudals and their workers. In some parts of Pakistan the feudal and Wadera big-wigs have their own private jails where bonded labourers (actually slaves) are kept as prisoners. Is this not a hideous shame?

Again, in the Frontier province there are areas where normal laws of this republic do not have any force. The writ of the Islamic republic of Pakistan is not honoured in the tribal belt. People in these areas enjoy all rights, observe no obligations. Paying tax is the obligation to the state that is most audaciously disregarded. If the reports in the newspapers are anything to go by, thousands of industrial units are operating in some special areas in the Frontier which are using WAPDA power without stint, and without paying anything for it.

Some of the most powerful (politically influential) individuals have had their names on the list of bank loan defaulters. They continue to be the beneficiaries of the notorious "law's delays." We do not hear much about the status of the co-operative societies that have collapsed, nor much about those that may be dying slow death.

Dodging taxes, patronising smugglers, harbouring and hiring patharidars' refusing to pay for utilities and services enjoyed and exploited, failing to put in an honest day's work in our offices and workplaces, pilfering government (public) property, stealing water from irrigation canals, adulterating food-stuffs, even drugs and medicines...Is there no end to wrongdoing that we indulge in without any qualms? Do we realise that we are hurting no enemy, only our own state, our own national well being, ourselves and our children.

We are already among the most corrupt in the world. Now we may also be among the worst kind of freebooters.

Wednesday, April 21

14 vehicles taken away

By Our Reporter

KARACHI, Nov 10: Fourteen vehicles — six cars and eight motorcycles — were either snatched or stolen in different areas of the metropolis in the past 48 hours.

This joke is at your cost, and mine

Fearing a loss of reader interest, most newspapers in our country now feel obliged to relegate news of some stereotype crimes to positions of no prominence in the inside pages. Reports of theft, dacoity, rape and gang-rape, car-snatching, bank hold-up, water-pollution, power or water theft, traffic jam, road-blocking, co-op scam, bank loan defaults, money lost to the government, don't make news anymore. What is happening all the time, all over the place, is NOT news. This is what has been happening all the time. Simple.

Like a nation of infinite variety that we still are, the styles vary from place to place, town to town, city to city. It is only natural that one major city specialises in some varieties of crimes, another city indulges its taste after its own fashion. Some revel in rape, others in, may be, power theft. By way of specialisation, environmental pollution is becoming a raging craze. There is not a city or hamlet that is not in this game. There are heaps of garbage everywhere Newspapers couldn't care less. It is NOT news. Not in Pakistan any more.

There was a time when 'encounters' and the names and numbers of those disappearing as a result, used to appear prominently in the national newspapers. No longer. What happens often ceases to be news. Good newspapers are in the business of news only. Millions of dogs may be biting millions of men. But that makes no news. So, if there are 'encounters and encounters' every now and then, and people getting shot and killed as a matter of routine, the news reporters are going to lose interest. Routine stuff is not worth reporting. Not, even if it should be deaths.

Once upon a time newspapers took due interest in the bhutta culture. It has vanished from the newspapers. Only when we are close to festivals like our Eids there is some mention of the traffic cops collecting their twice-a-year tribute from road-users. This seasonal rash of roadside bhutta-gathering does get reported but in most cases with a kind of visible boredom. Reporters who manage more spicy stuff don't touch this kind

of stale fare.

Relatively elder citizens in Karachi and Lahore may vaguely recall a time when car-snatching used to find a place on the front pages of national newspapers. Then, this kind of news got pushed to the back page. In the third stage, car-snatching became a kind of a splash on the 'city' page. As the car-snatching tendency spread wider and wider, news about it started becoming smaller and smaller. Now car-snatching in Karachi has ceased to be news. There is a brief, reluctant notice — perhaps only for record.

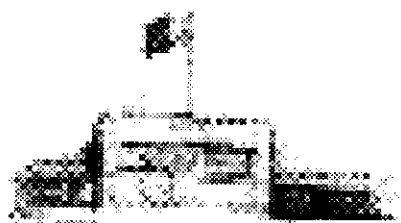
For some reason, yet to be determined, lately money losses to the government have been making the headlines in our national newspapers. Such and such department has suffered losses running into so many hundred million rupees. These lost amounts represent money due to the government and not collected, or this was the money that should have been there and is missing, or some bills have been over-paid resulting in so much of loss to the government.

Reports of 'losses to the government' now fill the columns of our national dailies. What is left benignly undefined is the identity of this poor hapless entity — the government — suffering those losses in hundreds of millions of rupees by the hour. All of us read these stories with supreme indifference and disinterest. How does it matter to us? Let this thing, the government, go to blazes, for all one would care. We have our own cares, haven't we? Besides, where is this shiftless orphan — the government?

For the innocents, it may be respectfully suggested that the government is, in fact, a label rather listlessly put on the real name — the people, you and I, and he and she, we and they. All of us and all of them. The losses inflicted upon and suffered by the government are the damages inflicted on the people of Pakistan — also by the people of Pakistan, through the people of Pakistan. It is money going out of the pockets of the people. From my pocket and from your pocket, if you don't mind.

Who needs enemies, if there are friends like we have?

Sunday, June 27, 1999.



High style at low cost

Wednesday, May 12 deserves to be recorded in golden letters in the history of our honourable Senate. It was on that rare day the upper house of our parliament presented the soulful picture of peace and tranquillity and provided a memorable example of unity of thought and purpose. Also action. The several lines that keep the Senate divided in perpetuity had faded away. It was one united House with one united voice.

The honourable members of the Senate spoke with one voice against the government's designs to place all federal 'lodges' on sale. How could the government entertain such an imprudent, impertinent, short-sighted, self-defeating, unwise and unprofitable idea? Putting the federal 'lodges' on sale as if this lot was the mountain of officially used wastepaper Punjab government had decided to sell without any ceremony.

No honourable Senator worth his salt would countenance such reckless prodigality on the part of the government, admittedly cash-strapped though the government was. It must be conceded to the credit of the conscientious Senators that they do not like being made to look a spoilsport. They have never earnestly spoken against the government's privatisation spree. Who among the Senators does not know that the prime minister would not hesitate to sell anything, if only he can find a buyer.

On the point of selling, the prime minister has left nobody in any doubt that his commitment is utterly selfless. Did the PM not offer to sell his own abode, the PM House? Also his palatial secretariat in Constitution Avenue? He has also put the exquisite Convention Centre under the auctioneer's hammer. All the banks are for sale. So is the entire power structure in the country, including the WAPDA, but definitely excluding the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz Group).

Our honourable Senators have never even remotely tried to put a wet blanket on the government's unqualified and unreserved (never mind if also a shade unthoughtful) pursuit of the objective of selling national

assets in the national interests. All this is of course to protect the people's mounting prosperity. Barring some digression, the Senators have remained scrupulously uncommitted on the issue of privatisation which is, as everybody knows, only the polite word for selling national property.

Now the government appears to be trespassing on the Senators' preserves. What on earth does the government mean by wanting to sell the federal 'lodges.' Doesn't the government know it is in these lodges that the Senators and their staff and their supporters and, of course, their families, dependants, relatives, guests, friends, servants stay, -- before, during and also after the Senate's working sessions? How does the government expect the Senators to serve the nation and the Islamic republic if they and their dependants were denied even a day's rest, a night's sleep and two square meals in these 'lodges'?

On the federal 'lodges' the Senators have a prime claim. As some Senators rather thoughtfully commented, these 'lodges' provide them with the needed service and comfort at "low" cost. This comment is so brief that if it was not adequately elucidated, it may be misunderstood by the lay public of this republic. The essential utility of 'lodges' is that they provide to the most lavishly privileged lawmakers the highest level of comfort and hospitality at lowest cost in town.

The honourable Senators who have been kind enough to note this facility provided at 'low' cost were being unduly modest. Time and again the newspapers in the country have had the pleasure of reporting about the uncleared arrears that grace the ledgers of these 'lodges.' These, if the official accounts are to be believed, run deep into millions of Pakistani rupees. These unpaid bills are in respect of only board, telephone, other incidentals and the high class lodging provided at low cost by these 'lodges.'

A fair statement about these federal 'lodges' would be that they provide 'low' cost service only to those lawmakers who care to pay for the services they draw upon and enjoy. For others, it is all on the people of Pakistan at NO COST to the honourable lawmakers.

The Senators' articulated displeasure over the idea of selling the federal 'lodges' is perfectly natural. It falls perfectly into the pattern of our reigning culture.

Thursday, May 13



Impatient to start a war

Nobody in right mind would for a moment question the right of the opposition leader (and former twice prime minister) Ms Benazir Bhutto to take the current prime minister to task for perceived failures to serve the nation properly and wisely. Indeed this right belongs to the lowliest citizen in the republic. The difference is that the lay citizen will not invite criticism for being naive or disorientated. But Ms Bhutto will at once attract flak if her criticism is wide of the mark.

In the context of the historic meeting (Saturday, February 20) between the prime ministers of Pakistan and India in Lahore, any hasty and superficial comment for the sake comment will not escape instant scrutiny. First, an unbiased observer will look for the intent behind criticism targeted on the prime minister. Then, one would evaluate the content of the criticism. And soon after, the motivations for the attack.

Allowance must be made for the fact that Ms Bhutto is in the opposition and it is her right — as also her duty — to oppose. Provided, the act of opposing has solid logic and reason. Provided also that the motivation is inspired by a constructive spirit. Be it noted that Ms Benazir Bhutto failed to respond sportingly to the invitation to the state banquet in honour of the guest from India. The invitation was late, she has alleged. And she was otherwise busy.

All of us are doing something or the other. And in our respective modest positions (as distinct from the august perch of Ms Bhutto) we believe we are doing something that is worth doing. But when the duty of the state knocks, we are expected to have a sensible order of priorities. The state comes first.

The invitation to the state banquet was a call to perform a duty in the service of the state, not in obedience to the prime minister. Any citizen would have cancelled, or put off all other engagements and commitments in order to respond to the call of the state. After all, such occasions are not commonplace. It was an historic moment, regardless of the political loyalties or animosities. Ms Bhutto stood on a point of petty vanity. One expects her to be

able to rise above self when the call is from the state and something not only quite distinct from the government but also above it.

By all reckoning, it is much too soon to be rushing to launch an attack on the very idea of the visit. Common sense, unvitiated by small egos, would suggest that any open contact at higher level between Pakistan and India is to be welcomed for its own sake. If it does not leave a rich crop to reap, it does not do irreparable damage by itself. Our prime minister invited his Indian counterpart. The invitee could have said: "no thanks". But he did not. He responded positively.

Let us not be such spoilsports as to refuse to see things for what they so plainly are. The Indian prime minister is not as safely ensconced in his office as our PM so obviously is. In accepting to visit Pakistan, the Indian PM risked a great deal more of opposition and brickbats at home than did our prime minister in inviting him.

Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee undertook the journey, knowing full well the political cost to his government, already under much pressure. He undertook to face our unforgivingly articulate press. On a short notice he brought with him leading journalists and intellectuals, in addition to senior ministers. It is surprising that Ms Benazir Bhutto is unable to see what is on the surface, and what is quite easily perceptible beneath.

The leader of the opposition seems to argue that Mr Nawaz Sharif should have obtained publicly proclaimed concessions from India — all in advance, all in the open and in return for nothing. This kind of expectation would have sounded beautifully innocent if it had come from a six-year-old girl child in the nursery, pleading with a doting uncle.

In the our world of hard-bargaining international diplomacy, nothing is for free or likely to be served like a burger in a self-service fast food restaurant. Do we not know what tough customers our Indian neighbours are? Does Ms Bhutto really believe that the Indian prime minister drove up to Wagah in a bus, for no other consideration than to please our PM? Or for the fun of a day off from the rough and tumble of his domestic politics?

Nobody can firmly promise many wonderful things to come out tomorrow or the day after from this event. But there is some reason to believe that our prime minister did not stick his neck out only to see how sharp the Indian knives were. Nor should one expect the Indian PM to have chosen to do anything so utterly unwise. We should assume that both knew what they were doing — also precisely with what realisable objectives.

Ms Bhutto would be doing nobody any harm (and none to herself) if she would wait for a while and let the sequel to this event unfold itself. There would be a lot of time to start playing politics. Why not wait for a while?

Tuesday, February 23.



About the culture of democracy

It is by no means the first time, nor one suspects the last, that the issue of quorum in the national parliament is compulsively claiming the attention of all who care for the democratic culture in this Islamic republic. The foundation as well as the structure of a democratic polity is the totality of its elective institutions. These bodies proclaim that the people are sovereign and their accredited representatives are the rulers. The highest embodiment of this culture is the national parliament.

How does the national legislature exercise the sovereignty of the people? Through the instrumentality of the executive which is the creature of the people through the parliament. Thus the parliament is the parent. The executive in the shape of the government is its child. In our culture disrespect to the parent is the ultimate in bad manners, is it not? Mr Nawaz Sharif is known and admired for his filial fidelities: obedient son of Abbaji.

The Nawaz Sharif government is now being hotly accused of being less than considerate to the parliament. He heads what he claims is a 'massive mandate.' In terms of arithmetic of numbers it is 'massive'. In terms of parliamentary presence, this 'Massive Mandate' is conspicuous only by its persistent absence. The quorum bells in the National Assembly keep on whining most of the time. Apparently, the Massive Mandate, is not interested in the wailing of those bells.

In democracy, as in all free associations, the secret of success is tolerance for the other party. If a government with such a massive majority is not prepared to accommodate a minuscule and scattered opposition in the parliament, it is doing its own image much damage with its own hands. Normally, session is called by the government. But its own members are not interested in attending its proceedings. What would you call this?

To be noted with even more regret is the inattention of the ministers. They remain absent even when they are scheduled to answer questions or to respond to debates clearly indicated on the day's agenda. This is not

the indifferent way you can carry your own family with you, let alone a national parliament representing 135 million people.

The appropriate forum to address the nation from is the nation's parliament, not the Pakistan Television screen. Throughout the Second World War, the British prime minister Winston Churchill was, fighting for the life of his nation. He was constantly in touch with his people. The communication between the leader and the people was through the parliament, not through the television or the radio.

What passes comprehension of a normal citizen of Pakistan is the prime minister's inability to get his massive flock to attend the sessions of the National Assembly and the Senate. More than two years have gone by. The problem of the quorum has only aggravated. All that is needed to solve it is a circular from the PM's office to all members of the ruling party and its coalition partners, advising them firmly to attend to their duties as members of the parliament. If they cannot make any other contribution, let them make it by their physical presence and honestly earn their salt.

Does one have to remind the prime minister that the poor people of this country pay a handsome salary and an array of allowances to the honourable Senators and MNAs? The government does not pay, the prime minister does not pay: the people pay. The paymasters have a right to insist that due service is performed for which the payment is collected. The irony is that the prime minister secures the services that the people as the paymasters, should receive from the so-called 'massive mandate'.

Where would the mandate be, if the people refuse to vote? If this is the irresponsible and undignified manner in which the elected representatives continue to conduct themselves, they may be left high and dry next time the elections come round. And if the present parliamentarians are dropped by the voters by the wayside, where would the prime minister be?

This kind of plain speaking will inconvenience only those who are even now uneducated in the democratic culture. It is about time the prime minister realised that half his term is behind him. Only half of it is in front of him. By the time next elections are held it may be a much more awakened electorate, and much less amenable to extra-political persuasions.

Good friends of the prime minister should advise him that if he wants to win the next election, this is the time to start the campaign. The world is becoming extremely sensitive to good political manners. So are our people. For far too long politicians in Pakistan have taken the voter for granted. Forget it. Now is the time to learn the new lesson — and remember it.

Monday, March 1, 1999.



Of our inhuman unconcern

How many of us ever talk of 'human resource development?' And how many would know what it is all about? It is leaking no state secret to an enemy agent to say that 'human resource development' is not a major concern in our country. Where the human being should be at a discount, talking of human resource development would be rather out of the way for most of us who believe they have better things to do. For instance, get WAPDA power theft inquiry jettisoned.

Whether we like it or not, the United Nations has a Development Programme called the UNDP. This outfit has a presence in our country. Its report for 1998 has something to tell us about ourselves. The message can be taken as a compliment, or as something of an embarrassment. It depends how you feel about being part of the human family.

This study covers 174 countries from the point of view of human resource development. Out of these, 137 countries are doing significantly better than we in Pakistan are in this field. We are seen to be not quite as bad as 35 countries but much worse, than more than three times as many at 137. Even the most ardently patriotic Pakistani citizen would find it hard to feel proud over this ranking on a world scale.

In the first category, that is countries doing well, we find 45 countries. Those not doing well enough, nor too badly, are just about twice that number at 94. At the bottom of the ranking are 35 countries where the state of human resource development is appalling. It will be seen that we have escaped being in the worst category literally by the skin of our teeth. In the second class we are second from the bottom -- perilously close to third class.

For those who feel compulsively about comparison with our good neighbour India, the news from the UNDP is not exactly heart-warming. Placed at No 132, India is five notches better than we are. No doubt that does not make a world of difference. But looked at more closely, it in fact does. In India the per capital income is considerably lower than in

our country. This obviously means that India's human resource concerns are more significant with less money than ours with relatively more resources.

This finding takes us to a highly thought-provoking point. Concern for human beings is a matter of attitudes -- of the level of culture and civilisation, if you please. At the foundation, it is a question that relates to the respect that is shown to the human individual. There can be several scales whereby one may like to measure a society's sensitivity to the dignity of a human being. One suggested measure: in our country the UTPs (under trial prisoners in jails) out-number actual convicts. That much for the respect for the dignity of the human individual. This has nothing to do with material resources.

Globalisation of life has been studied by the UNDP in various dimensions. One of these is simply scary. "Criminals are among the beneficiaries" of this Globalisation of trade and commerce. Organised crime syndicates are estimated to gross US\$1.5 trillion a year. This sinister activity includes trade in narcotics, weapons, labour, goods and money. No country-wise breakdown is available. What finance minister Ishaq Dar says about our 'informal' economy should, however, give us an idea of what may be our contribution to the US\$1.5 trillion of criminal international commerce. Our underground economy is put at around Rs1,500 billion.

Perhaps there is one feature in the UNDP report for 1998 that may be viewed by us as a kind of comic relief in Shakespearean tragedies. In the earlier report Pakistan had figured in the third and lowest category. We have risen by some six steps or so to get to the bottom of the second class. But it has been explained that this little enhancement in our status is not, repeat NOT, because of any perceptible improvement in human resource development in Pakistan. It is only in recognition of a somewhat better awareness of what human resource development is about. May be, the UNDP view is that a few more people in Pakistan may now be talking (though not doing much) about this rather exotic topic -- the human being.

This is most probably seen has a good omen. Let us see if we move forward or relapse into our third category perch, as the year before.

Saturday, July 17



This is only a sample

All law-abiding citizens must in one voice raise three cheers for the police force in the district of Jhang. It has arrested 245 POs in just the first six months of the current year. For those who may not know, PO stands for 'proclaimed offender.' Praiseworthy though this performance is, let us not jump to the hasty conclusion that this means that the people of Jhang district can now go to sleep in peace.

What has not been stated by the police boss in Jhang is the number of POs who remain at large and free to continue their predatory free enterprise which means big game not petty larceny or minor harassment of the people. Nobody is elevated to the status of a PO unless he has established for himself the reputation of committing violent and heinous crime over a length of time. A PO is also one who has repeatedly duped the police and eluded arrest.

This is not a matter on which much can be said with certainty. However, as things go in our republic, one may assume that in six months -- that is half of one year -- the police has been able to nab half the POs of the district. This would leave us with 245 POs (give or take ten) still on the prowl. That should mean the district of Jhang can claim to have produced 490 POs in a single year. Let us round this figure off at 500.

If that be the representative average for a district, the good reader will have no difficulty in computing the number of POs the province of Punjab harbours. And then work out the figure for all the settled districts in this Islamic state. We also have the unsettled regions, the tribal areas in the Frontier province and Balochistan.

We cannot claim to have much knowledge about the PO population in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA). What we certainly can say is that they are unlikely to be lagging very far behind their brother's in other parts of the country. If anything, they should be more enterprising

because they have less laws to abide by, and almost no police or courts to inhibit their jolly lifestyle.

Nobody can tell for certain what is the potential for mischief of an average grade Proclaimed Offender? However, we have noted that one has to be a confirmed criminal of a particularly violent variety to be designated a 'Proclaimed Offender.' To be one is not an ordinary criminal's cup of tea. A PO must have a number of daring dacoities, some cold-blooded and premeditated murders, with some kidnappings and rapes thrown in to his name. This roughly should be the bill that one must produce to become a PO.

During the first half of the current year, Jhang district police alone has been able to 'recover' 6 rocket launchers, 8 klashnikovs, 100 rifles, 150 guns, 80 revolvers, 12 hand grenades and thousands of bullets of various kinds. All this adds up to an arsenal of no mean destructive power. Also included in this bag is 220 kg of charas, 280 kg of opium, 30 kg of heroin and 600 bottles of liquor. In the process, the police has successfully destroyed 33 distilleries. This would work out to less than 20 bottles per distillery. Rather small beer, one might say, in passing.

This at best is a thumbnail sketch of one district. The group picture of the republic as a whole would be more than a little daunting. We cannot dismiss this pretty scary record as crime at a small retail scale. Remember what we have available is only a glimpse, not a complete picture. A mere sample -- if you please.

Can we ignore those who insist that what the police at their best manage to get hold of is the tip of the iceberg. Marine scientists say they see no more than 1/18th of the whole mass of the iceberg. So this is less than one fifth. What we may not really know would be 400 per cent of what we know. In this portrait there are some fairly big grey and blank areas. For instance, there is no mention here of the 'encounters' between the POs and our efficient police marksmen, and the score in terms of lives extinguished.

Why the police officers in Jhang chose to leave this aspect of their performance under a veil is not clear. But they must have their reasons to tell us only this much and no more. We cannot complain, can we?

Wednesday, July 28

Feel the pain behind crime

Except for the solar eclipse, the last of the 20th century, there was nothing very special about Wednesday, August 11 in Karachi. A random picking of headlines from a leading national morning daily of Karachi yielded these gloomy tidings:

"Frontier Constabulary Cop kills cook of Saudi;"

"Eight hold-ups committed, 15 vehicles hijacked;"

"Constable gets 25 years RI for raping (10-year-old) girl;"

"Sale of spurious drugs on the rise."

This is more or less a normal day's normal diet of crime and violence in Karachi, the largest city of Pakistan. Also the nerve centre of its economy. A semi-official organisation estimates that ever since the departure of the former governor Mueenuddin Haider, car thefts have registered a rise of nearly 30 per cent within only a few weeks. This may, or may not, be directly related to the arrival of the new set-up which is and quasi-political and known to be temporary.

The present governor and the Prime Minister's advisor are political appointees as distinct from the former governor who was a retired Major-General of the Army. Be that as it may, the situation on the ground is that Karachi remains pretty thickly infested with crime and violence, as it remains rather thinly administered. On the sidelines, the elected provincial assembly meets and talks. Nobody in Karachi or Islamabad is listening to the laments of this elected house.

At the moment nobody has much time to give to Karachi. First, it was Kargil and Kargil and Kargil. Then the sequel to Kargil, is on everybody's mind. Quite naturally, too. But if not today, tomorrow or the day after, those who can, will have to do the needful to rescue Karachi from the jaws of the criminals.

The government of Pakistan has been unable to find a buyer for the Chamba House in Lahore. Or for the Federal Lodges in Murree. Why? One reason for this fiasco is the awful state that Karachi has been in for so long. The inclination to invest in fresh projects is just not there. Banks are sitting with piles of money that nobody is coming forward to borrow and invest.

A conservative estimate puts the number of flats lying vacant in Karachi for more than three years at around 400,000. The State Bank of Pakistan says there has been no "project investment" for the last two years. Like it or not, Karachi sets the tone for economic activity in the country. The clouds over

the Chamba House in Lahore and the Federal Lodges elsewhere exude the dismal mood of Karachi.

It is no secret that the Privatisation Commission is finding the going very slow in its efforts to disinvest. For more than two years so much has been up for sale: real estate, nationalised banks, engineering enterprises, telecommunication corporation, oil and gas and what have you. However, progress is conspicuous by its nearly total absence. This situation is almost entirely due to the destabilised atmosphere hanging over Karachi. You do not have to go beneath the surface to see that the problem is political and political alone.

Sindh is the only province in the republic that does not have normal governance. How can things get stabilised in an ambience marked only by inertia, frustration, pessimism, self-doubt, uncertainty, and above all, so much of crime and raw violence?

That Karachi will have to take a back seat if the crisis in relations with India does not cool down, is no doubt understandable. But if the signals from Karachi get drowned in the din of Indian hostility, Karachi's pain will not go away. The longer it is left to its agony, the more difficult it would be to solve the complications in and around Karachi.

The most damaging part of this unhappy situation is that the economy of the country is descending deeper and deeper into recession. The whole country will have to pay the bill for the repair of this damage.

Let us not forget that the rising graph of crime and violence is the symptom, not the disease. It only indicates that the political health of Karachi is deteriorating. Crime and violence only confirms this diagnosis. These are the manifestations on the surface of the convulsions underneath.

If police and the allied agencies could handle the crime situation there would have been no crime. Police is everywhere. So are the Rangers. Also around are the FIA, CIA and the Constabulary. Probably more that is not visible. But it is unfair to expect these instruments to substitute for the political process that has been arrested, if not really reversed.

Also unfair and unrealistic it is to expect the new governor and the Advisor to the Prime Minister (and may be also a team of nominated amateurs), to produce miracles. Individuals, however wise and worthy, cannot run countries and governments. That age has passed irretrievably into history. To resort today to antiquated strategies is to play hide and seek with the present reality. Wishes cannot be horses that will win battles in real life.

The languishing state of the nation's economy is saying it all.

Thursday, August 12, 1999.

Terrible but not unusual

On Sunday, October 3, the national newspaper brought cause only for profound dismay. Headlines on their front pages gave the reader shock after shock. Some of these were more than sufficient to ruin the breakfast even of the children waking up on a weekly holiday to a morning stained with blood.

Some headlines from one newspaper:

- "Nine killed as sectarian violence continues";
- "Four killed in attack on Karachi Madrassah";
- "AIG (Police) gunned down in Peshawar";
- "Pir shot dead in Muzaffargarh";
- "Bhalwal TJP leader killed; toll rises to 28 in two days; around 500 sect activists held."

Another newspaper said:

- "Sectarian strife claims six lives in Karachi;"
- "Two killed in Punjab violence;"
- "AIG Police Peshawar gunned down."

Yet another newspaper said:

- "AIG among 7 killed as violence spreads;"
- "4 including, 3 children, shot dead in Karachi;"
- "Panic grips Karachi after killings;"
- "Five Afghan-trained outfits behind violence wave;"
- "Nawaz Bows to stamp out terrorism."

Does one need more to be plunged into a sea of unmitigated despair? But let us for a moment set aside despair and let reason take over. Some factors stand out and hit the eye as well as smite the heart. No 1: it is without doubt a wave, not sporadic carnage. It is a planned and organised outrage. One newspaper, with headquarters in Lahore, makes no bones about who might have a hand in this bloodspilling. It identifies "Five Afghan-trained outfits."

Just Look at the irony. During the reign of dictator Zia, we were training the Afghans to fight America's war. Now the same Taliban, or their surrogates or hired agents, are returning our compliment. How sad Zia is not alive to see this spectacle that would have warmed his heart so much -- Muslims killing Muslims, in the name of Islam, too.

Alas, "This even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips...", said Shakespeare.

So, we may be reaping the harvest of hatred that we foolishly allowed Zia to

sow in our clean soil.

Those who are able to see beyond their noses have been repeatedly warning the nation against the danger of the Taliban turning upon Pakistan, if and when the going got difficult for them in Afghanistan. That may be beginning to happen. There is no doubt who is the father of the Taliban synfrom? But, wait a minute. Is Benazir not the sister? Did she not plant Maulana Fazlur Rahman on top of our Foreign Office? Has tNawaz Sharif not been fraternising with this very element? Is Raiwind not the hub and centreso such activity more or less in the same lines? Is there any doubt about the inner inclinations of so many others in high positions?

Although Karachi has a very bad name in the context of violence, this wave is country-wide. It began with a small town in southern Punjab. The next day Gujranwala was the scene of killings. Then Karachi, now Peshawar. What is remarkable is the uniformity of the pattern. The killed bear a perceptible kinship. Growing now is the suspicion that the killers, too, may be linked into a fraternity.

Predictability, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has proclaimed his determination to "stamp out terrorism." Before him, Zia had made the same hypocritically extravagant vows. Then, we saw Benazir launch two declared wars on "terrorism" with her interior minister blithely issuing orders to shoot at sight. They did kill at sight, but their quarry was qualitatively different.

Nawaz Sharif had inaugurated his war on terror in 1992. He has renewed his commitment to "stamp out terrorism." It was in pursuit of this noble objective, that he dismantled the constitutional set up in Sindh. Is this not the We heard Nawaz Sharif make those promises hundreds of times. So what? Nawaz is gone, violent crime stays on.

If the violence has a familiar face, the response of the governments so far presents no surprises. The vow to stamp out terror is very familiar indeed. Then, as the wave of insensate violence spreads, so does the wave of indiscriminate arrests. This is open season for our police. Every time this kind of campaign is launched, many hundreds are arrested. The ritual of "round up the usual suspects," is now on. You would never know who has been arrested and on what evidence, if any? And who are we, the citizens, to ask such audacious questions?

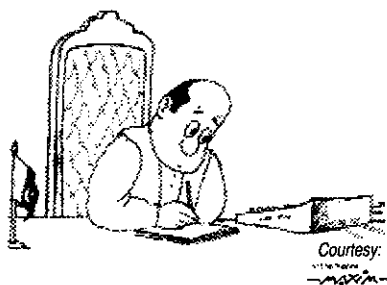
After the arrests the parents, sons, relatives, friends neighbours of those arrested do the running from pillar to post to find out the reasons for such widescale rounding up of the "usual" suspects. After the excitement subsides, the arrested would be free to buy back their freedom. Nothing in life comes for free, surely not freedom from police hands.

Before long we are bound to forget the dead, also those who caused these deaths. The hundreds of the arrested, too, would be forgotten. And then, it will be business as usual. No reason to be overly upset. The killing is in the name of Islam.

This reminds one of a line from poet Dagh Dehlvi, the ustad of Allama Iqbal.

Murneywalon ko merhaba kehiaay

Sunday, October 3



A thought for the soul of law

We must really congratulate ourselves on the blessings of having a law minister, in the first place. Then, having one like our venerable Khalid Anwar. Mercifully, he keeps his own counsel. But when he does deign to open his mouth, he gives you a choice. You are free to laugh or lament. Because, as far as he is concerned, it is your funeral, anyway.

His latest would have been singularly hilarious, were it not bound to remind sensible citizens of the forty years or so spent in the wastes and wilderness of protracted martial law juntas. Talking to some journalists in Karachi the other day, Khalid Anwar indulged himself to a joke. "The people have welcomed the military courts," he said with a rather indelicately contrived air of a senile sage. (The Military Courts were later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Pakistan).

Perhaps unwittingly, the law minister did not specify what was it that impelled the 'people' to 'welcome' military courts. Mr Khalid Anwar would be the only man of law who would look upon the prospect of having to establish military courts with such ease of conscience and equanimity. Military courts are not established for the mere fun of it. They are set up when the government, or whatever be the authority, is forced to admit that normal courts, working under normal laws of the land, have ceased to be able to deliver.

It can be argued, no doubt, that such a profoundly unfortunate situation has come to be. And so, unfortunately some military courts had to be set up. But this is by no means something to invite the law minister of Pakistan to feel perfectly at ease with himself and with the gloomy situation on his hands. One should have expected to see the law minister in some kind of dismay. Quite the contrary. He never felt happier, it seems.

If the normal law can no longer be relied upon, nor the normal processes of law and procedures of justice, this must be a surpassingly grave and grim situation. And surely one in which a law minister should realise that

for this regrettable state of affairs he is more responsible than anyone else in authority. Imagine the depth of frustration of a 'people' that they should be reduced to the extremity of actually welcoming the protection of military courts

Here we have a situation in which the military has had to undertake the responsibility of dispensing justice as an emergency beyond the call of their normal duty. The law minister has evidently failed to see the poignant irony in this situation. Number One: the deep anguish of the people over the fact that the government has admitted a failure and has had to call in the military in what is a civil situation. Number Two: there is no suggestion of any regret, let alone remorse on the part of the one minister whose business is to see to it that the normal law and process of justice should prevail.

We ought to look to the side that provides some relief in such a melancholy setting. Law minister Khalid Anwar has set up an extraordinary record as the government's highest law officer. He has seen so many laws enacted that are difficult to reconcile with the essence of the soul of law itself. Any enactment that undermines, overrides, replaces, negates, suspends, supersedes, ridicules the normal law of the land is an enormity, and an unmitigated outrage.

The law minister will certainly have all the knowledge of, and about, law. Alas, he is not acquainted with the spirit and soul of law.

For his benefit, therefore, a brief quote from an American lawyer* is placed below:

There are not enough jails,
Not enough policemen,
Not enough courts
To enforce a law
Not supported by the people.

Period. For the intelligent, said Allama Iqbal, a hint is enough.

NB:* Hubert Humphrey (1911-1978).

Friday, December 11



All this and heaven too!

According to the Old Testament, God created the cosmos in seven days. Nawaz Sharif insists full, infallible justice shall be done in three days. Such perfect justice shall be done and also appear to have been done within three days. Further, such impeccable justice shall be delivered at the door of the seeker of such justice within three days. And there is to be no charge. To anyone saying 'thank you,' Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif of Raiwind will say: 'My pleasure.'

Fortunate citizens of this Islamic republic, can you honestly ask for more? Of course not. There is only a very slight rift in the lute. Our elders have often raised their greying eyebrows when presented with something that appeared to be just too good to be true. Over this three-day promise they shake their heads and softly murmur: 'easier said than done.'

The optimists amongst us occasionally tend to mistake the promise for performance. As far as justice is concerned, the universally shared experience of a vast majority of citizens of this Islamic republic is that justice is something that only dreams are made on. Those who have their belief still unimpaired even by hard personal shocks, take refuge in the divine promise of a Day of Judgement. If not here and now, we shall secure justice on that day. That is some consolation. That is the last refuge of the irredeemably damned. Thank God for it.

For most of us a better way of looking at uncomfortable facts of life is to be comforted by sweet words. Now Nawaz Sharif has an inexhaustible supply of sweet promises. Sometimes his claims are even sweeter. He has promised to throw away the 'begging bowl,' the kashkol, if you please. All the talk about World Bank, IMF, Asian Development Bank and Pakistan's negotiations with these institutions is only a matter of courtesy. More indeed to keep these lenders in the business. As far as Pakistan is concerned, it has cast away the kashkol -- and for ever.

The same is the case with Pakistan's defence and security. "I have made Pakistan's defence and security impregnable," claims NS. How very reassuring

ing to be so categorically assured on so vitally important a matter. We continue to hear, however, that the prime minister has been talking to Bill Clinton about Pakistan's security concerns and seeking Washington's contribution to our defence capability.

This must be a case of putting Bill at ease at a time when his weapons sales have been faltering. Poor Boeing is in a bad shape since Pakistan stopped buying its aircraft. As far as we are concerned, we haven't a care in the world. Our defences are impregnable. Depend on NS for that and have a good sleep. If the Doubting Thomases still have their doubts, why not call NS on that special hot line telephone number meant for this purpose?

Our prime minister is excellently served by his 'law lord.' Thanks entirely to advice from the ministry of law, every major legislation has to be amended at least twice within three days of its announcement. These amendments often take the form of 'clarifications.' The three days affair has not yet been amended by the relevant ministry. But the military courts have done the needful without bothering the law ministry.

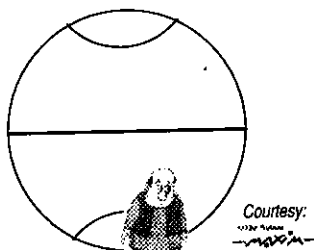
Sindh governor Moin has let it be known that the military courts may take their own time. The three days discipline is to be taken metaphorically. Like you say "don't worry, sir, it'll be done in no time."

We have had some clarifications already about wedding ceremonies. The people concerned have been told point-blank that all that marriage hassle must be gone through in a businesslike manner (Nawaz Sharif is a businessman) and wound up before the sun goes down for the day. Enough should be enough, when it is enough. For good Muslims, nights are for prayer.

There is always room for second thoughts, or thoughts even after the second thoughts. It would seem that on this marriage affair, we have not yet heard the last word. NS doesn't relish rigidity in anything. The discipline limiting marriage parties to the time gap between zuhr(early afternoon) and asr(late afternoon) prayers can be reconsidered.. How about relaxing the last limit till the isha (late evening)?

Well, if the three day frame for dispensation of justice, (nothing but justice and the whole of justice) can be stretched to accommodate the unforeseen, what's the problem in letting the marriage ceremonies extend beyond maghrib to isha? None at all.

With our defence impregnable, economy radiant, kashkol cast away for ever, Karachi handed over to military courts, justice at the doorsteps in three days, marriage disciplines in place, CA (Constitution Amendment)-14 in full cry and the way cleared for CA-15, it should now be time for a break -- to celebrate on a national scale! PTV bring in your cameras and lights. Action! Wednesday, December 9



Towards small wonders

Prime minister Nawaz Sharif keeps reiterating his philosophy of small government. Yes, we all know it all too well that he stands for not only a small government but one getting smaller and smaller. In his two years in government, we have observed with increasing excitement the government losing not its girth and weight so much as its authority. Which probably is in harmony with Mr Nawaz Sharif's administrative strategy and political theology.

Although the scaling down is a comprehensive process, we have seen it making remarkably rapid progress at some of the most crucial levels. For instance, the federal Cabinet is not too frequently inconvenienced to get together in a formal meeting. Cabinet meetings are few and far between.

At the provincial level, too, the frequency of cabinet meetings has been reduced to a great extent. Happily for Sindh, the superfluity of a cabinet has been dispensed with altogether. The second largest component of our forward-looking republic has had its elected assembly sidelined as a disposable accessory. When one individual as a governor or an advisor can govern, well, let him. That's plain logic, is it not?

Maintenance of law and order used to be considered the basic and primary function of the institution we call the state. All the classical theories of 'social contract' that we were taught in school have outlived their validity in a republic so single-mindedly in pursuit of the Islamic polity as this one. As the first major step to ensure law and order becomes instinctive to us, we have allowed the civil police to proceed on an undeclared and informal long leave with full pay and perks. Their conventional right to live off the people remains unimpaired.

To the aid of civil authority (largely put out of action to reduce the government) the Rangers have been called in. This is a double-benefit strategy. It relieves the police. In addition, it provides the Rangers some diversion from the dull routine of their bare-pay boredom in the dreary barracks. They get some exercise and the benefits that go with work outside one's line of duty.

Everybody is happy.

Normal civil courts (the normal magistracy in the country), are being progressively relieved of normal responsibilities. This, too, is part of the programme to curtail government in the country. In place of normal courts we have devised special courts, extra special courts, speedy courts, anti-terrorist courts & etc. We had also set up a line of military trial courts (MTCs) which was due to be augmented, if the Supreme Court had not chosen to forbid any such move.

It will have been noted, no doubt, that the normal law and order system has not been involved in apprehending thieves that have been bleeding WAPDA of its power, pushing it to the brink. The Army has been called to the aid of civil power to deal with thieves of power. Sounds how very lyrical, in addition to be so obviously logical! This kind of theft is patently far too trivial to bother the police with.

Prime minister Nawaz Sharif would be loath to worry the government about some other thefts of similarly peripheral character. For instance the defaulted bank loans resulting in virtual theft of some hundreds of billions of rupees. This money belonged to the people who can well afford to bear that loss. Besides, a government due to be reduced cannot be expected to have the time or the energy, apart from inclination, to be chasing thieves of hard cash.

Perhaps the most significant part of the steps taken so far to make the government really small has been the manner in which the Central Board of Revenue has been cut to size, that is, the desired abbreviated size. The strategy deployed in the CBR is to scale down the revenue collection targets. In just about half-way through the last fiscal year, the revenue target had been cut down twice.

One point needs to be clarified here. Making the government small makes sense only in reducing the area of its authority and responsibility. A smaller government means smaller as well as effectiveness. There is no intention whatsoever to cut on the fat, or the weight, or the expanse of the government.

For the doubting Thomases let it be pointed out that as a matter of policy, it has been decided that the ban on fresh recruitment to federal government services has been removed. Provincial governments have been advised to follow in the footsteps of Islamabad. You may rest assured soon there will be plenty of career opportunities for the sons of right blood count.

The observant will not fail to see that we have a government which knows how to expand career opportunities for its deserving youth at the expense of the government alongside a resolute effort to reduce the government itself. It takes wise and selfless leadership. Thank heavens we have it.

Friday, February 22, 1999.

Winds of Change

Anything that is artificially pushed up is bound to come down. Some things might stay aloft a while longer than others. But come down, all of them must. Apparently the ascetic Brahmins sitting in our Foreign Office did not know of this elementary lesson of life. From the day dictator Gen Ziaul Haq took the panic leap into the Afghan fray, our FO has been promoting in that accursed land one nondescript mullah after another. There has never been any understandable rhyme or reason in this madness, utterly bereft of method as his lunacy has been all along.

This cannot be said for the dictator. He was absolutely clear about what he was doing. Helping the US drive out the Soviets? No, he had no love for the US, nor any animus against the Soviets. The General was only saving himself from the inevitable consequences of what he had done to the Constitution of Pakistan. He knew and dreaded the punishment for anyone subverting the fundamental law. Of all the parties involved in the Afghan tragedy, only Ziaul Haq came out successful and totally unhurt.

The Soviets met their Waterloo in the rugged wilderness of Afghanistan. The United States did exterminate its Enemy No 1, but lost much of its face -- and all of Afghanistan. Pakistan is carrying the funeral on its shoulders. Washington is trying to pretend it never had anything to do with Afghanistan. As for the Afghans, they never had such an unhindered opportunity of killing their own kin and kind and enjoying the blood-stained carnival. On the side, they are pumping drugs, weapons and contraband goods to their associates in Pakistan.

As of this moment, Osama roams where the Soviet once ruled the roost. All the US-patronised mullahs, who were playing their sad musical chairs in that tormented land while the US-Soviet tournament was on, have been ousted, one by one. Now nobody rules in Afghanistan except disorder. The other name for that is Taliban. Good, old Ziaul Haq went into Afghanistan with a plan. His purpose was served to its last detail. He came home in one piece and dry, his pockets bulging with what was to be the grist for so many mills and some banks to boot! Of that loot, the historian will no doubt write some day with the help of records in the United States' CIA and, hopefully, our ISI.

That he did not live long enough to see Pakistan Islamised to its toe nails is quite another matter. Good Muslim believers have to believe that the inveterate Islamiser was removed from the scene by none but the will of God Almighty

himself. The General had become totally indestructible by any human device. Only divine Hnads could lift him, as indeed those Hands did on a sultry August afternoon over the Bahawalpur desert fringe.

Now, back to the FO and its galaxy of Mullahs, including the youthfully clueless and shiftless Taliban commando figure. Where are the Hikmatyars, the Rabbanis and the whole of that caboodle? Nobody in the FO really knows, because nobody ever cared to know. Most probably nobody was capable of comprehending what was big-power politics. It was big-game between the US and the Soviets. Ziaul Haq was hired only as beaters are hired when the Waderas go for bird shoot.

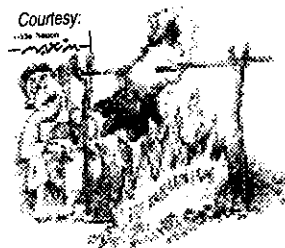
As for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, he is not particularly fond of the Taliban junta in Afghanistan. But what does endear the Taliban to Mr Mohammad Nawaz Sharif of Raiwind is the expeditious and unhesitant manner the Taliban dole out justice. Nobody can deny that life and death are facts of life. They have a connection. What the Taliban in Afghanistan have done is to put these two facts of existence cheek by jowl. Once the Taliban have a man they do not like the face of, the distance between life and death shall not be longer than three dawns. With the Taliban justice is summed up as death-in-three-days. Nawaz Sharif also passionately wants to pursue that kind of justice made easy and instant discipline.

Nobody can take most of us in Pakistan by surprise. Not even prime minister NS. We seem to have come quite some distance from December 2. A police party has been going the rounds in Lahore as a marriage party -- complete with bride, bridegroom and what have you-They have been on the lookout for Osama, wanted in the White House. Why should anyone be looking for that character in, of all place, Lahore? And why must the good old police brass don the glamour of a bridal party when on such a sensitive assignment.

A friend suggests this is one way of mixing pleasure, rather fun, with the performance of a solemn duty. When you move as part of a marriage party, you guarantee yourself a warm and cordial reception, no matter where you choose to land. Another comment, made with a measure of unsmiling wisdom, is that it might have been better if the party had kept the bridegroom's slot vacant to encourage Osama to oblige those out to get him. A charming policewoman in bridal dress should be able to captivate and capture the most abstemious heart in our society. May be, Osama would have been less unforthcoming if that strategy had been adopted.

Yes, may be.

Tuesday, December 8



The case of mistaken identity

In what may be a strategic move, the government of Pakistan has set up a committee of the Ulema to contain, and hopefully to combat 'sectarianism' and the violence it is generating. That is very thoughtful of whoever has fathered this innocently fanciful idea. Here two terms are basic. The Ulema and sectarianism. If we had consulted Socrates, he would have advised us to define what is Ulema and what is Sectarianism.

Let us do this exercise. What or who are these Ulema? In a normal and rational context, Ulema would mean the plural of A'lim — one who has Ilm — enlightenment. And in this particular context an A'lim would be one profoundly well versed in the teachings of Islam and its categorical imperative(s), as Emannuel Kant would have emphasised.

One does not have to be a learned person to say that in Islam there is one God, one Holy Prophet (PBUH), one book, one corpus of laws and ordinances, one community (Umma, if you insist) united on these fundamentals. Our poet, philosopher and guide, Allama Iqbal has added two more points on which the interests and well being of the entire Umma converge: its profit (Munfi'at) and its loss (Nuqsan) coincide, converge and dissolve into one — The Wahdat.

It should directly follow that there is no room whatsoever for any schisms in the name of Sects in a community with Wahdat as its central and immutable attribute. In the first place, would any of the pious and learned Ulema kindly take the trouble of explaining how come we have Sects negating and doing violence to the Wahdat? Where is that one rope to which we are to hold fast and to no other?

Where is the permission for Sects? Where is the room for such divisiveness? And where on earth is the logic of these Sects being not only at daggers drawn, but actually engaged in implacable warfare through their separate armed forces, Sipahs? Every Sect has it's Ulema and its Sipah, its contingent of troops. There are scores of Sects. Thus "Sectarian violence" has led to killings, persuading the government to set up a committee of the

Ulema. If it were a manageable aberration, the government could very well have sorted it out off its own bat.

Today in this Islamic republic we have more than three score and ten distinct sects and none of them is on genuinely peaceful and amicable terms with one another. This is 1999. Pakistan came into being in 1947. At its birth, Pakistan had no sects doing any kind of business in this truly pure and innocent country. From 1940 (March, 23) to 1947 (August 14) there was no mention of any sect in the Pakistan movement, that is, in the ranks of the Muslims in the Pakistan movement led by the Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Will some learned Ulema please unfold this mystery? Pakistan could be attained without these sects and these pious Ulema. Pakistan did splendidly well without this blessing of 'sectarian violence' until 1977. There were no sectarian standard-bearers and no Ulema, and no 'sectarian violence.'

The Birth, rise and proliferation of sects and their duelling Ulema, is a very recent phenomenon. What makes this so scary is the element of lethal violence. Where, for heaven's sake, is the place for violence in any Islamic community when the word Islam itself means PEACE?

The good people of this country have infinite patience and a robust sense of humour. Sending up a body of Ulema in aeroplanes to scour the skies for the moon is accepted sportingly. It is some fun, after all. But even in this kind of moon-sighting, the Ulema do not fail to contribute their measure of unease until deep into the night; occasionally, until past-midnight. This is as if before the facility of flying, moon sighting was not done.

As any ordinary citizen in this country will tell you, it is these Ulema who have invented these sects, in order to be their heads and engage in their highly specialised business of generating sectarian conflict. If they could agree among themselves, there would be no sects, no sectarian violence. There was no violence before the birth and growth of these sects. Once again, listen to Allama Iqbal. Remember his warning: ".Din-e-mullah..fi sabilillah fisad?"

One is left to wonder what reasoning has led the government to invite the inventors of sectarian violence to help it combat this curse. Is it the rather familiar tactic: set a thief to catch a thief? But banish this irreverent thought without a second thought.

We must look forward to some very ethereal game plan. Wishing you all the best.

Friday, April 9, 1999



Courtesy:

Noise and fury signifying bad manners

Normal people of common sense and proper manners find it very hard to see why anyone should take to streets and make what is only a nuisance of himself, or themselves? Had it not been a common enough experience of most of us, we would simply refuse to believe what we see as the Jamaat-e-Islami doing in the streets is really happening. Such distasteful performances only leave one aghast.

The JI has a perfectly valid and legitimate right to hold any views its undeniably limited vision obliges it to hold and profess. But to force it upon others is manifestly unfair. If they claim to hold a point of view, they must let others hold their point of view. Crowding the streets, making deafening noise, blocking normal, lawful movement in the thoroughfares, intimidating citizens cannot be justified under any pretext or excuse.

If a public demonstration has to be staged, there are civilised ways of doing that without becoming an outrageously unruly and uncivil. A quiet peaceful public gathering should be the way to do it, provided nobody's right of way is violated. If you have a message, by all means have it in the shape of banners or handbills. The language must remain within the bounds of common decencies. Calling names, using abusive expressions, raising unnecessarily loud and ill-tempered slogans only demonstrates bad manners.

A good case never needs a loud, angry and abusive voice, never. You don't (or should not) need a drum to communicate a logical, reasonable and civilised point of view, do you? But JI demos as a rule are loud, angry, menacing and intimidating. To a reasonable citizen this would only indicate an obvious lack of conviction. If you have a convincing case, why use violence of voice, violence of expression, and also pure raw violence? Or threaten dire consequences here as well as hereafter for those who are not inclined to fall in line?

One may grant the JI was within its rights to put up a protest show over the visit of the Indian prime minister. But it is very hard to grant the JI the licence to go berserk in the streets. The visitor from India has been invited by

our prime minister. He is the guest of the state, of this Islamic republic. He is entitled to courtesy, also kindness, protection, hospitality — so long as he is our guest and on our soil.

Is there any doubt that our prime minister invited him? Is there any doubt that it is a cardinal principle of our culture that a guest must receive the utmost respect and courtesy and be made to feel welcome, at home and respected? What does the Islam of the Jamaat-e-Islami say on the subject of guests and the obligations of the hosts? What is the Islamic ordinance about the equation between a guest and host?

A new technology has gone into the JI's endless forays into disorderly public conduct. They have never been much to write home about as far as consideration to women was concerned. They are the advocates of the primitive mental debility of insisting the a woman's place is in the home. Of late, the JI has been putting large regiments of black burqa-bundled females into the streets where it wants to do battle. This is so disagreeable a tactic as to defy belief. How can any political force throw purdah women to face the fire and brimstone of street battles?

These are the women for whom the JI has no concept of emancipation. Women are to be "half of men" when their legal status and rights are concerned. But to fight the battles of JI in the streets and bazars, they are to wage battle in the vanguard. What kind of culture is this? What kind of politics is this? What kind of Islam, if you please, is this?

As far as the JI's politics is concerned, sensible citizens couldn't care less. This party has been driven into a total wilderness. It has no representation in any elective institution of this country. Not a single seat in the parliament's two houses. Not that it did not contest. The truth is that never in the history of this country has the JI ever scored any considerable success at the polls. The people have rejected it time and time again. Now it is in a phase of utter poverty, consigned by the voters into a political orphanage. It is a desperate political outcast.

Beware of desperate people. They can go to any extremes. The JI is only proving this truth.

Saturday, February 20, 1999



Be kind to thy good Cop

Among the many peculiarities we have developed over the years is the tendency to permit double standards to cloud over good sense and better judgement. Only take a look at our capricious attitude towards our police. High are the standards of alertness, uprightness, honesty and efficiency we demand from the Cop. Very well. What about the way we kowtow to our honourable lawmakers?

The Cop observes the discipline of his dress. You will find all Cops in uniform and quite uniformly so, too. They are always around at the road crossings. Only the most ungrateful would deny that they do usually prevent most of the motorists from enacting an eternal hell on our roads. Why be so humourless as to fail to see the artistry they bring forth to persuade us to shell out some Eidi?

Complaints have started appearing in the newspapers that the Cops are collecting Eidi. What else would you expect on the eve of Eid? Do you seriously suggest they should be soliciting in the name of Shab-e-Barat at this time of the year? Or under some other outlandish head? A few days ahead of the Eid, the levy in the name of Eid is perfectly in season. Have a heart. Appreciate the sense of the timing.

Ask yourself the simple question: if the man in the uniform takes an extra cash, what is so very unusual? Who doesn't in this generous republic? Ask the banks who are searching for more than two hundred billion rupees unaccounted for. Who are we to grudge the Cop's cut when the prime minister doesn't grudge all those billions lost to all of us?

Emanuel Kant, the European sage, taught his people that "duty must be done, though the heavens fall." Kant was lucky. He lived into his middle 90s. Suppose Kant was born in our pious republic and persisted with his cant about duty. He would have been hauled up for possessing a dozen klashnikovs, 207 rounds of ammunition, and also a kilo hashish, but ultimately hanged for blasphemy. Look around yourself. If you can find anyone willingly doing his/her duty, report at once to the nearest Jamaat-e-Islami

chauki, outpost.

Not everybody knows enough about law to be sure how our lawmakers think about duty and performing it too. For the better part of the day it is the quorum bell that is on duty, wailing away its message: Honourable lawmakers are you listening? No, they are NOT. They could not care less for whom that bell tolls.

The prime minister is very proud to claim that he has a massive mandate, unprecedented in this Islamic republic. He is right. He has more people behind him in the parliament — on paper. How many he has on the benches inside the House is another matter. You must be a killjoy (or RAW agent) if you are probing into a PML(N)'s in-house secret.

A nuisance even this powerfully backed government has not been able to remove from parliament house is this platoon of newspaper correspondents. They seem to belong to the tribe of Peter Pan who never learned anything nor unlearned much. The other day these news people tried to spoil the day for the Info minister. They failed. He remained the smiling chubby cherub he is. God bless him. The pen-pushers drew his attention to unpopulated benches of the massive mandate.

The minister said, the mandate boys are in a holiday mood. For our law-making 'boys' the holiday season lasts half a decade. They are elected for endless holidays. They remain on holiday, unless some Khan, — Ghulam Ishaq or Farooq Ahmad Khan — throws a spanner in the works. In such untoward accidents only the governments fall. Then they go home. After 90 days of some fun, these boys are 'returned' to the same seats from the same constituencies to form the same mandate, for whoever should happen to be the new prime minister. Prime ministers come and go, or get dismissed, but the boys on perpetual holiday emerge without a scratch.

Well, then, if such be the culture of the lawmakers, do you expect the minions of law to be any different? Why must they be different, pray? Birds of a feather flock together. The cop clan helps the lawmakers in their way up. The lawmakers return the compliment when they are up there. This give-and-take is fair game, no robbery. We have watched it being played for half a century and more. If we do not congratulate ourselves, we are free to go to blazes.

Don't spoil the Cop's Eid. The others are taking a lot more. If you cannot stop the big bully, be ashamed of yourself. Leave the Cop alone. Pay the Eidi he is asking for. Remember he gives twice who gives without the asking. So, look sharp. Put down the money. And shut up!

Thursday, March 25, 1999.

Of common sense and courage

If contribution it can honestly be called, the only contribution that the feudal class makes in this country is the produce in the agriculture sector. Look at it. This country is blessed with five mighty rivers, the most fertile lands in the world, sturdy, hard working and cheerful peasants, four distinct seasons, world's largest irrigation network. It was once the granary of the whole of South Asia. Now it cannot feed its own people, less than one-fifth of South Asia. This is a calamity.

For this calamity we have to thank only the feudals. They have systematically impoverished the country. And goodness be praised, they also rule (over) it. In the feudal Pakistan, there are three main crops: wheat, cotton and corruption. Wheat crop is declining because of evils of the feudal system. Cotton crop fails to flourish as well as it should because of pests. And the whole country is sick because of corruption of which the source and fountain are these feudals.

The chemical pesticides are usually spurious, diluted, over-priced and under-weighted. In these malpractices the feudals and their agents have a vested interest. No wonder, the actual crop of wheat is inadequate to assure two square meals to the people. The cotton yield is less in quantity, low in quality. Because the feudal farmer is lazy and indifferent, being too rich to bother.

The smaller half of the original Punjab province, that has fallen to the share of India, is doing wonders. It is feeding the teeming one billion people of India. After that need is fully supplied, there is a surplus for export. If trade relations with India normalise we may be importing part of our wheat shortages from nearer home, instead of the distant Australia or the US.

Do many people in Pakistan know that the 'desert' kingdom of Saudi Arabia grows more wheat than it consumes? And we grow much less than what we need? It does call for three cheers for Saudi Arabia. But not for us. Does it not put us to shame?

There will be those who may be itching to say we produce more but it is smuggled out. If that be so, who are the smugglers? Those who point to the smugglers ought to know who exactly the smugglers are? Who are they working for? That's quits. We come back to where we started. If there is no smuggling the feudal farmer's return on his crop will droop. Smuggling, too, helps the feudal farmer.

How about cotton? We can sum up the long and melancholy story of the 'silver fibre' by a mere mention of the 'curl leaf.' This is a curse, as old as cotton. When Mohenjo Daro was a living civilisation, the Greeks were importing cotton from here. Because of its Sindhi origin, they would call this milk white fibre 'sindon.' In the great civilisations of Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley this fibre was called 'kattan,' hence cotton as the English know it.

Those who were growing finest quality cotton 3,000 years ago had no 'curl leaf' fears. Today we cannot save it from the pest. Man is scouring the space, the feudals in south Punjab and north Sindh cannot find a preventive for a tiny pest. Our wonderful ministry of agriculture is helpless. This is what we have to show for our agriculture research. Bravo.

Before the fault-finders rush to point out that one major crop has not been mentioned, the one that is doing well. Yes, rice is doing well. But there is a difference. Cotton and wheat are the feudal belt crops. Rice, the better quality grain that is, grows mostly in non-feudal Punjab. It grows well. The difference is showing. And the cause behind this difference, too, is too glaringly visible not to be noted by all of us.

What keeps the wheat and cotton crops constantly under attack from pests is not really those minute creatures. All the pests can not only be controlled, and destroyed after the attack but their very existence eliminated. Not by the ne'er-do-well feudals. They are not interested in the problems of this nation. Most of them are too rich to bother about crops. And most of them are too busy with political manipulations to cover up their 'favourite' pastimes.

So long as we do not change the system of land ownership, there is no hope in heaven or hell to win the battle against the pests, either in farms or in political parlours. We shall continue to be deficit in wheat and every year, cotton crop will not be able to oblige the estimates of the clueless optimists in the ministry of agriculture. And thanks to these feudals, our political house will be plagued as it has been all these long, wasted years.

When, oh when, will the rulers of Pakistan have the common sense to identify the real pests that are eating up all the crops in the country and corroding so much else of value in this republic. What is needed is not some supernatural pesticide, but just a modicum of political common sense, and just a bit of moral courage.

Both seem to be in woefully short supply in our country today -- political common sense and moral courage. Pity these commodities are not available in any foreign market. If they were we shall import -- or perhaps smuggle in.

Tuesday, April 20



For the Nau-roz read Roz-e-hisab

T rue to their kill-joy chemistry, the uneducated Taleban hordes crudely holding sway over Kabul have declared the Nau-roz festivities as un-Islamic and hence under an instant and total ban. Since reports from Kabul remain clouded with confusion, one can only presume that anything even appearing remotely to be in disregard of this sadistic ban will attract cruel state action, not necessarily excluding the capital punishment.

Human life has no value in the books of the Taleban. Hanging is their answer to anything, any act not fancied by the regime. The killing is done with the fervour and rejoicing of a festival. The corpse is hung on the roadside or outside major national buildings. Of late, in Kabul this ritual is held in the city's main sports stadium.

In their wisdom, the Taleban have elevated killing to the status of sport, played out in the open arena of the national stadium, where the victory stand should be, now hangs the noose. Bravo!

Where life is reluctantly spared, the limbs are blithely removed, leaving the human being disabled for life. In civilised society the purpose of punishment for wrongdoing is to cause improvement in the conduct of the culprit, not to cause pain and permanent disability. How is taking away a limb, or the life itself, going to help the wrongdoer? Or, the society of which he/she was an integral part and product?

How can any man in right mind rule out the possibility that the same man, reformed by civilised corrective treatment, may turn out to be a truly sublimated member of the community, an asset to the same society after a moral regeneration and transformation? History is replete with examples of people turning the corner after a first offence and becoming model human beings, dedicating their lives to service of humanity and humanitarian causes.

But it takes educated and civilised people to think of the human being through a human and civilised understanding of social and moral issues in

life. The Taleban have so far dashed every well meaning expectation from them. They continue to go down the road to self-mortification.

Now to Nau-roz. Every civilised society has a distinct sense of a beginning, a start, a commencement, a source. In one way or another, human beings cherish the first day, the inauguration of an enterprise, the beginning of a project. These moments, marking the beginning of an event, are celebrated by different cultures in their respective ways. What remains common is the feeling that there is something special, something sacred, something worth commemorating the first step, the first move, the first day. And so on.

In different cultures the New Year falls on different days of the year. There are different calendars in the world. Some cultures go by the lunar year, others by the solar cycle. But in every recognisable culture the first day of the year carries a special significance, connotation, sanctity adorned with hope and joy. It is but natural for civilised human beings to take note of the special flavour of the first day of the year. Rejoicing and celebration on the New Year comes as naturally to human beings as the new leaves to trees in the spring.

But the Taleban will have none of it. That is not all. They will not allow others to feel happy, to entertain and nurse hope. And in that hope to celebrate the event. If some people would like to get together, eat together, exchange gifts and sweets, to sing and dance, the Taleban will beat them up, or throw them into prison, or impose fine and inflict indignities and humiliation. They might even hang people by the next lamp-post. All of this in the good name of God, the Al-Rahman and Al-Rahim!

Perhaps the only provocation for the Taleban to suddenly decide to come down so unmercifully on the Nau-roz is that this celebration at the beginning of the spring season is very special to the Iranian culture. It is, of course, celebrated in many other cultures also. For the Iranian people the Nau-roz is a major festival of the year.

The Chinese people also celebrate their New Year in a very special and enthusiastic way. For the Christians, the New Year is the day of all days. In short, the urge to be happy and to share happiness is one of the most innate of impulses of living beings. Also one of the noble and elevating of human instincts. Usually, charity and kindness is a strong factor in such rejoicing. We think of those who need special attention, care and kindness.

Is there any way to show these purely human aspects of celebrating festivals to the Taleban who have appointed themselves to decide the rights and wrongs in life and to punish without mercy those they cannot agree with.

Do they insist on holding the Roz-e-hisab — the Day of Judgement — under their own authority?

Sunday, March 20, 1999.



Corruption is among our minor vices

Pakistan government must have excellent reasons for saying 'no thank you' to a global conference on corruption in government. However, this moot may be taken with a bit of seriousness because the State Department of the United States has thought it fit to have convened it. Also because around 90 nations of the world have responded sportingly to the invitation from Washington.

If our friends in the US believe corruption in government is a world problem, they are welcome to their rather weird views. Corruption may be a problem for the world. And it may be a worry for the sole world superpower. Not for Pakistan. Therefore, the government of Pakistan has decided to have none of it.

Why has our government taken a stand that, as a direct consequence, places us under the world spotlight? Two possible explanations suggest themselves. First, our government would have thought, as it so obviously thinks, corruption in government is no problem in Pakistan. If it is an heartache for the ninety nations, and the United States, involved in that moot in Washington, well, they can please themselves.

There can be another reason for our prime minister to have declined an invitation from the State Department. For all we know, the prime minister feels that we have gone too far down that road. Our corruption is now well past correction. Why waste time and effort on chasing an objective that is so now obviously unattainable, as far as we are concerned? Besides what is past cure is also past care.

There are better things to do. For instance, another motorway. This time, one from here to eternity. The Jamaat-e-Islami claims it has the route map. What about housing for all who need housing? Thank goodness we have millions without shelter. A third possible consideration, though highly unlikely, may have been to allow no distraction to interrupt Senator Saifur Rahman's crusade to chase the corrupt to the bitter end, even if this pursuit should take him to the snow covered peaks of the Swiss Alps.

We live in such a small world that untoward occurrences like natural calamities

ties, or man-made distortions like corruption, no longer respect sovereign borders. Look at the corruption rampant in Switzerland? It has crossed into Pakistan, leaping quite a few states en route. The Senator's sentries had to chase a number of Swiss intruders who were obviously up to no good in our corruption conscious country.

Eradication of alien corruption in Pakistan must be given the highest priority. Our own corruption is, after all, our home affair. What's the mad hurry about it? So long as the proceeds of corruption remain within the country, the government is not going to lose its sleep. The fruits are only moving from a hundred Pakistani hands to one or two hands, Pakistani hands. Overall, the nation's wealth remains within the nation.

May be, the nations who have got together to think of corruption aloud and in a 90-voice chorus, do not have the assets the government of Pakistan has in such ample measure. We have special laws to deal with corruption. We have special departments in the government set up, both at the federal and provincial level. Not to be forgotten anti-corruption police. The commercial courts are round the corner.

How many of the 90-plus nations grappling with corruption in government are so comprehensively equipped to deal with this demon? Not many. We have special police and intelligence, special laws and special courts to combat corruption. If anyone points to the rating by the Transparency International, let him think over the matter afresh. It has another side to it.

If with all the paraphernalia briefly described above, we remain among the Top Ten in the world corruption league, what stops the world from giving three cheers to our corruption wizards? Is that not one more way of looking at our record? This is a more positive angle to look at a distinction which has been recognised by an international monitor of some standing.

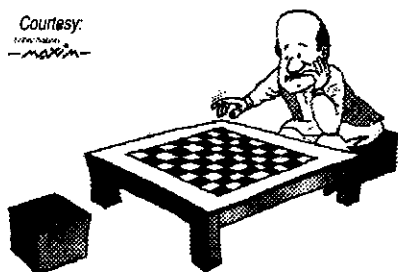
To the champions in this game, a conference like the one wasting its time in Washington, could not have had much to offer. It may be argued that we could render some advice to the conference, drawn upon our rich experience and expertise in the art and practice of corruption. Experts do not go overseas to seek advice and assistance of the sophomores. The beginners and amateurs should come to the accomplished in search of guidance. Why should we go from door to door offering precious advice?

We have acquired many other virtues, notable among them patience. We accommodate corruption in government. We cheerfully co-exist with it. And somehow manage to go along without exactly going under. The real wonder is not corruption in government. Look at the cruelty and shame we blithely live with and don't ever turn a hair. By our standards, corruption is among our minor vices. We don't count corruption as a problem.

It is a way life, a style. Above all, a culture, if you please.

Thursday, February 25

Courtesy:
—Mashriq—



Prepare the baggage for 21st century

Prime minister Nawaz Sharif has outplayed his predecessor prime minister Benazir Bhutto in the glob-trotting contest. Of course professional statisticians would perhaps know a shade better, but for the lay citizen, the man in the street as they say, it is by now safe to say he has landed at, and taken off from, more airports than BB might have in her time, that is in her two terms in office as prime minister of Pakistan.

For all we know, Nawaz Sharif may be off to yet another foreign capital, by the time this appears in print. Or he may have returned home already from his latest trip. In less than a few weeks he has been in the west in UAE and in the east in Brunei and Singapore. How truly and well the far-sighted Allama Iqbal forecast for Nawaz Sharif:

"Mashriq-o-maghrib mein terey daur ka aghaz hai

In the East and the West, it's the dawn of thy era.

Instead of beating about the bush, shall we go straight to the point? As prime minister Nawaz Sharif is travelling all the time all over the globe, let us just inquire what is it that we plan to shed behind in the dying 20th century and what do we plan to carry forwards into the next millennium? We have more than Rs250 billion of bad bank loans. The co-op accounts in the red are only relatively smaller, but they are there. We must have good reason not to talk about them. As poet M D Tasir might have said

Is mein chund parda nasheenon key bhi naam aatey hein

In this manifest also appear names of some veiled beauties.

Then, we have the loans we owe to the World Bank, the IMF and the others. These are usually computed in billions of US dollars. Our government has very thoughtfully arranged some sort of re-scheduling. This will most probably have the effect of enabling us to carry this baggage into the next millennium. It is some burden. But our shoulders are broad enough to carry loans, also the interest upon them. The rescheduling actually means additional interest on top of the hefty baggage we already bear on our shoulders. This also means extra odium of embarrassment. We are now

quite used to it. The burden of the interest and the embarrassment of ever increasing indebtedness does not trouble us anymore.

When we talk of our foreign liabilities, (these foreign debts) we are also entitled to talk of assets -- our foreign assets. We do not know the exact figure. We do know, however, that our former prime minister has some assets abroad, hopefully in more than one country. Some of her Peoples Party stalwarts, too, have once in a while hinted at some assets in banks outside Pakistan. At least one of the PPP heroes was recently reported to have suggested that he has these assets out of Pakistan for the "rainy day." Be that as it may, the fact remains that our compatriots have assets in foreign lands. These are Pakistani assets, in the final analysis. That's why good old Senator Saifur Rahman is constantly on the prowl for them.

Some notable Pakistanis (politicians, bankers, bureaucrats) are now living abroad fully prepared for their "rainy day." They must have reasonable assets to take care of them in grand style and princely comfort. Not to be forgotten is the money some people suppose went out of the country instantly after our nuclear triumph of last May 28 -- our Yom-e-Takbir. The bazaar stories say our Yom-e-Takbir may have cost us some hundreds of millions of dollars that went away.

Still on record is the promise former finance (and present foreign) minister Sartaj Aziz had made early in June to let the nation know all about it. All that the nation would wish to know is when and how that money is to be brought back to Pakistan. Now that under the inspiration of none but the PM we are going to have a big bang on coming May 28,* would it not be a good idea if Mr Sartaj Aziz recalled his promise and proved as good as his solemn word to the nation?

Let May 28, year after year, dawn with the announcement that all the money jubilantly transferred out of the country in the wake of that triumph has been brought to the last paisa, or perhaps last US \$, back into our Islamic republic and has been helping the nation to retire its debts and to retrieve its honour.

What do we decide about the "sick industrial units." Shall we leave them behind on the junk heap of the dying 20th century? Will the ghosts of these "sick units" not haunt us into the 21st century, if we leave them behind to die "unwept, unsung" with the departing millenium?

These and some more questions need the attention of our footloose prime minister. If the more pressing ones are attended to before the finance minister rises to present his budget for the next century, it would be well for all concerned, including the PM himself.

Saturday, May 15

· May 28, 1999

Rs 2,160m ex-gratia gifts for "Ghosts"

Among some of the most exhilarating discoveries our senior bureaucrats have been making of late in this Islamic republic is the discovery of an increasing number of institutions and individuals that have been officially categorised as 'ghosts.' So, we have 'ghost' schools, 'ghost' offices, to name only two for the time being. As befits it, Punjab the largest province, has been credited with having some 36,000 'ghost' schools. Sindh trails way behind with less than half that number.

If you have 'ghost' schools by the thousands, it is only logical -- and also inevitable -- that you should have 'ghost' teachers and other supporting staff like, say, quasid and his naibs and the night watchman, call him the guard or Chawkidar...Then, in a school for children there has to be a sweeper or two..

To be on the safe side, let us suppose that one average school of the primary stage shall have an absolute minimum of ten on the staff, including teachers. Thus the number of 'ghosts' in the 36,000 'ghost' schools in the Punjab province would be in the vicinity of 360,000. Assuming that the average pay of these 'ghosts' staff of the 'ghosts schools is a mere Rs500 per 'ghost' then the bill for the 'ghosts' for a month would work out to Rs180,000,000 How would the department concerned show this expenditure for the audit purposes. The most straightforward strategy should be to classify this figure of Rs180,000,000 as the Punjab government's ex gratia contribution per month in aid of the supernatural staff. That would work out to a neat Rs2,160,000,000 for a single year.

Our vigilant commissioner of the Hyderabad division in the province of Sindh is reported to be a little uneasy about the 'ghosts' that may be lurking within his division's public administration. At a meeting the other day, called by him specifically to address the 'ghost' staffing of government services in Hyderabad division, the officer is reported to have expressed a very considerable measure of concern, laced with more than a dressing of indignation.

It must be admitted that there is as yet no legally and constitutionally defined status of 'ghost' institutions or 'ghost' individuals. However, it can be argued, as Barrister Aitezaz Ahsan most probably would, that there is nothing in the constitution of the Islamic republic that would explicitly rule out the existence of 'ghosts.' By the same logic, it can be maintained, that there is nothing in the constitution to the contrary. Ground is perhaps available to give the 'ghosts' the benefit of doubt and also all those benefits that go with this benefit. It has to be conceded, therefore, that 'ghosts' have an established status and their presence

as a supernatural part and parcel of our society cannot be ruled out. Nor their entitlement to all the rights and privileges of a citizen. For the natural citizens, the holders of the National Identity Cards (NICs), these rights are at a discount these days. Of the privileges of the natural citizen, contact the nearest police station.

The chief minister of Punjab, who is happily also a real brother of the prime minister of Pakistan (and former chief minister of Punjab) took duly serious notice of the 'ghost' schools. Quite appropriately he took a very serious notice of the existence of 'ghost' schools in the province under his matronly care.

Leaving nothing to chance, he invited the Army to exorcise the 'ghost' schools. Whether the Army operation was under Article 245 of the constitution of the Islamic republic or not, has not been disclosed. We should be sure for some very valid considerations. What matters is that the 'ghosts' have received the most earnest attention of the provincial chief minister, helpfully assisted by the Army.

Our ancients believed that unoccupied houses are taken over by the 'ghosts' Khanai khali ra deo me geerad, goes the relevant saying. That should be fair enough. Occupying an unoccupied house should be no robbery. Nobody is displaced or inconvenienced or irked. Most probably why those schools came to acquire the occult status of 'ghost' schools was simply that these schools were not very much in use of anyone of, presumably, any consequence.

It is common knowledge that in the countryside, it is the local feudal (in Sindh, it is the Wadera) who rules the roost. These lords of all they survey, do not take kindly to the prospect of their serfs' children being exposed to the seditious tendencies inherent in education. They ensure that no children run the risk of the pernicious epidemic that schools spread in the serene environs of their fiefdoms. The school premises are therefore converted into the servants quarters; barns, stables or hostels for the lower category of the Wadera's guests or retainers or just hangers-on. In officialese such schools are declared 'ghost' schools.

England had at one time acquired quite a reputation for having countless 'ghost' mansions. Most of these haunted houses were actually palatial establishments, quite properly called 'stately' homes. Nestling in the lap of fabulously expansive surroundings, owned ages ago by knights and warrior lords (not war lords), these stately homes fell on hard times. Their lords most probably died in wars. The forlorn survivors of such gallant heroes found the honour and comfort unaffordable, thanks to the hefty death duties. They found refuge elsewhere.

The 'ghost' mansions, or haunted stately homes, as were respectfully called, always had a weird story or legend about them.

Friday, December 4



Direct from the heavens

Foreign aid may be a help but excessive dependence upon it is bound to have negative side effects. Rather like opium. Or heroin which is an opium-based concentrate. We have foreign loans to bridge the gulf between what we earn and what we thoughtlessly spend, rather squander. Foreign experts are everywhere, and their ubiquitous presence is only increasing.

Just think: we have foreign experts telling us how to collect our revenues. Foreigners have been called in to tell us how to privatise, what, when and why. We have foreigners building our roads and bridges. Foreign guidance helps us formulate our budget strategy. When are we going to do our homework with our own hands and our own heads? The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the Asian Development Bank, the London Club and Paris Club are to give us loans to tide over ever increasing deficits. Multinationals have the upper hand in fashioning our response to our domestic challenges. We are passionate patriots, always loud in promising to shed the 'last drop of our blood' and eat grass for a thousand years in the service of our dear Pakistan. The first thing Pakistan needs from us is some honest self-service. Don't talk too much of your last drop. Preserve it. What about the first drop of perspiration as a token of some earnest work?

If this tendency of depending upon foreign assistance is not stopped now, one can only wonder where this absence of self-help and self-reliance is going to lead us to? This is not an idle or purely academic question. Not any longer.

Just imagine: management of the fundamentals of the economy has been all but completely handed over to the international lending institutions and the multinationals. Major construction contracts are being handed over the engineering firms from abroad. Are we now waiting to hand over the management of the government to the East India Company? So it seems.

Only recently, we were witnesses to the extraordinary spectacle of some police 'experts' from Colombia giving us sermons about how to have peace in our largest city. How many people in this country know where, or what Colombia is? How many police officers know of the actual status of Colombia in the comity of nations? It is a tiny Latin American country, perennially in a state of unrest, generally also anarchy. We are dependent upon Colombia to guide us how to police our cities! Is this not ridiculous? Does it not make us feel so small in our own eyes?

Now newspapers are telling us that the chief minister of Punjab, Mr Shahbaz Sharif is contemplating a scheme under which we may benefit from experts of the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation of the United States) in the maintenance of law and order in our largest province, The Punjab. Why does it remain so difficult for the Punjab police and its complimentary services to do the job they are paid for from the public treasury?

Don't we have our own FIA (Federal Investigation Agency) to do the needful? What is the Criminal Investigating Agency (CIA) doing besides earning some dubious publicity? Our FIA is (or supposed to be) the exact counterpart of the American FBI. The CIA is in addition. And yet we think of foreign agencies.

What great wisdom lies in the idea of leaving our own FIA and CIA aside and idle, while enlisting the services of the American FBI from across the seven seas? Are we running so completely out of confidence in ourselves that we need the American FBI to ensure maintenance of normal living and working conditions in our streets, mohallas and towns?

The very thought of importing police assistance from abroad forces upon us two highly disappointing conclusions. One, that we can no longer depend on our law and order apparatus; two, that we are feeling incapable of setting things right where they have evidently gone wrong, and seriously wrong at that.

It is time our rulers sat down and started thinking of their responsibilities towards the people and this republic. The rulers are, where they are, to work for the nation and serve it. They cannot morally justify staying in power and using state authority only to abdicate it on contract to agencies hired from overseas.

If things are not satisfactory in the police force, well, identify what is wrong and set it right in an honest and open fashion. If the FIA and the CIA are both failing to perform satisfactorily, pinpoint their weaknesses and failures and carry out the needed work to reform and repair these services. That is what the government is for. We do not have governments at the federal and provincial level merely to enlist assistance and services from foreign governments and contractors and pay the bill from the public treasury. The public is entitled to expect service from the government, not from its surrogates hired from abroad.

Who does not know that over the years public services have rusted. This is the result of misuse of public services for the personal ends of people in power. The nation expects the present government to be different. It expects the government to repair the damage that has been done to public administration by previous governments. Let us have the business of governance done by the government and the function of serving the public performed by the public servants — not by replacements hired from far off lands on fancy wages.

It is time after more than fifty years that Pakistan started governing itself without having to lean on props and crutches borrowed, begged or hired from foreign lands.

Monday, March 8, 1999

Courtesy:
www.kabul.com



Don't kill our cricket pride

One can easily understand the concern in Islamabad to divert public attention from the Kargil episode. The Jamaat-e-Islami is not letting this happen. There is an irony here. In its previous incarnation this government had come to power under the banner of the Islami Jamhoori Ittihad (IJI) How fragile political marriages are. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will no doubt recall (with regret) his romance with the forces that engineer furore and tumult, hiding their unengaging face behind the Islamic veneer.

Many tongues in the bazaar have begun to wag ever since the on-going clamour began to spill over into our cricket dreams and also some nightmares. One view that may be gaining attention, also some adherents, is that the sudden 'hotting' up of the cricket kettle may have something actually to do to add potency to the Kargil antidotes. It is of course too soon to say how things turn out.

What is not very difficult to see is that this rather abrupt shake-up in the Cricket citadel does look precipitous. Who could have dreamed that the all powerful cricket Czar, Khalid Mahmood would be toppled? Lenin's do-or-die legions didn't do much more violence to poor Czar Nicholas than what we have witnessed being done to Khalid Mahmood. Several morals can be drawn from the fate of both the Czars.

The most obvious lesson is that power remains the most notoriously disloyal and unreliable mistress of easy virtue. Another lesson, no less disconcerting, is that power corrupts. Revered sages have been known to have fallen into disgrace because of the noxious element in power. Use of power has some risks. Overuse of power has many and more dangerous risks. Its tendency to corrupt is almost incurable. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Finally, the lesson repeatedly taught by history: those who remain in the power business never learn the obvious lessons. They do not learn from the experiences of those gone before. Unless tempered with humili-

ty, refined by wisdom and ennobled by grace, power becomes an implacable foe of its user. School children are taught about the Pharaohs. About Yazids. But the lesson is lost to visions blurred by the intoxicating lure of raw power.

The fall of Mr Khalid Mahmood was the big bang of cricket. Perhaps the biggest so far in our cricket history. He was the appointee of the powers that be. We can safely assume that Khalid Mahmood felt solid as a rock in the assurance that he had the backing of the Himalayas. Today he stands there to remind us of the disrobed and forlorn eminence of the fabled Nanga Parbat. If some people have sympathy for him, they too deserve some sympathy..

What exactly do the stern disciplinarians think they are aiming at? From the point of view of the Pakistani adorer of cricket what needs to be saved first is cricket. That is just about all we have to take pride in. These boys (may be there are some exceptions, but only some) have brought more honour to Pakistan than the governments of Pakistan, now rated among the "most corrupt" in the world. For some decades now, we have had governments that have invited world ridicule. There is no exception here.

By all means do the cleaning, if that is needed -- and possible. The second condition is more relevant to our present situation. With bank loan defaults mounting, with the CBR battling tax evasion, with the 'informal economy' touching the Rs 1,500 billion mark, with the piles of files about corruption in high places rising in the Ehtisab establishment, anyone setting out to clean our Augean stables is taking on a truly Herculean task.

Why is it always so difficult for us to do things quietly, with dignity and grace? Why must every act aimed at doing good look like a sadistic rage, designed not so much to save as to wreck? There is an infinite lot of good and grace and beauty in our cricket, this scandal notwithstanding. First save what is good and noble in our cricket. That should be the first, indeed the only purpose of any exercise designed to enhance the moral quality of any activity.

Tuesday, July 27

Between pride and shame

A tiny, island Asian state leads the world as the most "competitive" for investment and industry. It is Singapore. This is the finding contained in the Global Competitiveness Report prepared by the World Economic Forum based in Switzerland. What is being competitive for investment? Not quite a million dollar question. It simply means a country that is clean, free of crime, corruption and commotion. Given these attributes, a country is "competitive" for global investment and industry.

Singapore gained sovereign self-determination as a state in 1965. That makes Singapore our junior by 18 years. We are a nation of nearly 140 million, to Singapore's just about 3 million, may be less not more. Before it became independent, Singapore went through some harrowing experiences, the worst was becoming a battlefield in the World War Two. This resulted in social, political and economic upheaval. The War left Singapore -- the land the people -- so much the poorer for it.

Unlike Singapore, the part of the world that is our country today, has been a net gainer as a result of the World War Two. This part actually made enormous gains through the war -- millions of well paid jobs, lucrative war-time military contracts worth hundreds of billions of rupees. And we did not face any fighting, no war-wrought destruction.

As compared with Singapore, we are a homogenous nation, or ought to be. We are all of us professing one faith, or at least pretending to. Singapore is a mosaic of several faiths, cultures, languages. A nation of a mere 3 million people has four official languages: Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. Among religions in Singapore, there is Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism. Quite possibly, also Judaism. But there are no religious, linguistic, cultural or communal hang-ups. Harmony prevails.

We are a nation of one faith, the cardinal principle of it being one-ness. We have around 86 religious parties, all unfriendly to one another, some openly intolerant and hostile, frequently at daggers drawn.. Occasionally, they pick up their guns and spill blood. Some maintain their own 'armies.' We are supposed to have two state languages. However, language riots are not unknown to our national experience, are they?

Crime has no place in Singapore life. In our Islamic republic it would appear that crime is not only one of our occupations but the main preoccupation. It is often claimed that crime is now Karachi's fastest growing

industry. Car lifters make more than a billion rupees a year in Karachi city alone. Then there are other crimes, no less exotic and lucrative.

Defaulting on bank loans is crime. Stealing electric power is crime. Giving and taking bribes is crime. Evading taxes is crime. Ignoring traffic signals in the streets is crime. Smuggling is crime. Playing tricks on the police is crime. The police riding roughshod on people's freedoms and rights is crime no less. Is there a single crime listed above that is not shameful? How many of us are ashamed?

In Pakistan we have come very close to accepting wrongdoing in high government positions as a fact of life that we just cannot do anything about. Every government opens the shady record of its predecessor. Special courts and tribunals are appointed to conduct the ritual of accountability -- only of others, of those not amongst "us."

A Field Marshal dismissed so many hundreds for corruption. Then, a general who followed cashiered many more for the same crime -- corruption. An elected prime minister not only booted out hundreds for corruption, he invented his own devices to corrupt those not yet corrupt. The elected PM was hanged and the general who hanged him legalised and institutionalised corruption. Finally, he made corruption the science and the black art of voodoo governance.

The inevitable bitter harvest of state-condoned and state-patronised corruption is crime, cruel and dehumanised crime. We now stand at just about the threshold where society is saturated with corruption, crime and cruelty.--also revelling in it. We have anti-terrorism courts and anti-corruption courts. Now we are going to have Commercial Courts. Until not very long ago, we had military courts. But our genius seems to remain uninhibited by these ostensibly reformist motions.

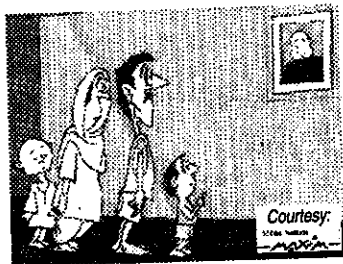
For the last three years running, Singapore is being rated as the most 'competitive' and we as the most corrupt in the world. What needs to be noted as our magnum opus is our capacity to dwell with all this without the faintest tremor of remorse. Repentance, like shame, is not in our book. We merrily sing with Robert Browning:

All's well with the world

And God is in His heaven!

Why fret about tomorrow, if today be sweet? For quite a few it indeed is sweet. It is heaven on earth.

Friday, July 16



Haris' lands in the heavens

Not even the worst foe of the prime minister would accuse him of being crafty or cunning. Nor his most indulgent friends would find him over-burdened with caution or foresight. He likes to trust everyone and take things as they come. If his flights of fancy occasionally take him to fairylands, he is no wet blanket to destroy the momentary ecstasy of the ethereal experience.

Whether all this is always helpful in politics, is quite another matter. Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif of Raiwind has been a reluctant politician. He was made for perhaps nobler deeds than politics in this country would let him perform. Doesn't he look an angel of generosity when he embraces the hapless Haris in rural Sindh? He is such a dear when he hands out those papers - the passports to prosperity for the poorest of the poor of Pakistan.

He is a person who cannot help but trust everyone. Evidently, he is a firm believer in the saying that 'trust begets trust.' Who knows if the untrustworthy is trusted a hundred times, he may one day become worthy of trust. Why not give people the chance to become trustworthy? Thus Nawaz Sharif takes things as they are handed over to him by his worthy colleagues or staff. No questions asked.

This is true of the papers that are supposed to be title deeds in respect of lands allotted to the Haris. What prime minister has the time to check the veracity and validity of every piece of paper? And what prime minister in Pakistan has the time to check and re-check after he has done a divine deed? From here to eternity, it ought to be recorded that Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif of Raiwind has done what he had promised to do: to turn the landless Hari into a landed farmer, set to become a wealthy Wadera.

The Mian has made sure that the land that he bestows on these Haris is duly accompanied by cash to enable them to buy the vital accessories of farming. In place of the bullock, Mian Saheb would like to give a green tractor. The newly landed-Hari is also handed papers that entitle him to adequate cash base. The Agriculture Development Bank of Pakistan is to provide

loans that carry no 'mark up' or nearly none. It should be presumed that the Hari is quite as free to forget about returning even the principal as all the Waderas in Sindh and most feudals elsewhere are.

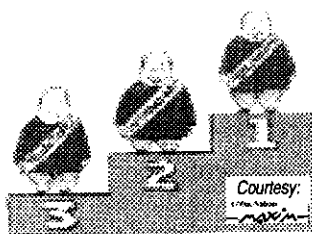
This is land reforms Mian Nawaz style, if you please. Thus far, the prime minister of Pakistan has been playing the Hatim Tai in the world of his innocent fancy.

Now, shall we return to firm earth and its not so soft realities? First, about the land given to the landless Haris. For all the prime minister may know, that land may not exist, or is still under the waters of the river Indus, or not accessible, or just not arable. In the remote eventuality that the land is there and cultivable, then the chances are that before the Prime minister's helicopter has taken off, the title papers, too, have been taken away from the Hari's hands. He will once again be landless as ever he was, the PM's gift(s) having vanished into thin air.

What about the provisions so thoughtfully made for the accessories and inputs -- a tractor, cash to buy implements, fertiliser, pesticide, seed and what have you? No Hari can read or write. Besides, he just cannot believe that there is anyone in his sort of world who would do him a good turn and mean it, too. Before the sun sets on that day, the Hari is exactly where he was -- the title to land, the promised tractor, the in-put loans from the PM notwithstanding.

If there is anything really tangible in this shadow play, it is taken away by the Wadera or his toughs. The Hari may have earned for himself only some extra risks to his life and limb for the sin of having made a mark of his existence, however pointlessly. As the mullahs tell the poor, these Haris will get the PM's real gift in paradise and those would be for ever. God loves the poor. That is why he made so many more of them.

So much for the PM's land for the Haris. It lies in the heavens.
Monday, October 4



Houses here and hereafter

Newspapers are supposed to tell us what we do not know. A Rawalpindi newspaper talks of shortage of graveyards in that city. The newspaper is wasting its energy and resources. Also its readers' time. In addition, it is taxing the patience of the general public already over-stretched by the chronic quorum problem in the National Assembly in nearby Islamabad.

Now that the issue of shortage of graveyards has been raised -- quite an untimely distraction -- let us put things in their proper perspective. What this so-called shortage of graveyards really boils down to is, in plain language, shortage of housing for the departed.

Take a look at the picture on the national scale. This problem, shortage of housing, is much more acute for the living than the alleged shortage of housing for the dead. These two shortages are the two sides of the same coin.

However, it must be conceded that there should be a certain priority for provision of housing for the dead over housing for those not yet dead and gone, but unsurely waiting for their turn to go.

The living somehow manage to find shelter above the earth and under the sky. But the dead cannot be left to their own their devices. Even so, let us not bring the government into this.

Don't we know that housing for the living has never been the concern of the government? Why inconvenience the same considerate government with the problems of the dead? Democratic governments do not lose sleep over the disposal of the dead because the dead are most unlikely to be voting at the next general elections.

Neither do the dead promise to attend public meetings to clap and raise the earth-shaking slogans.

When there is a problem, the right approach is to locate the causes. That done, the next step is: attack the causes at their root. The graveyard shortage is a national problem, not a Rawalpindi exclusive.

The living and the dead are the two aspects of the same picture. The dead are those of us who are no longer living.

The living among us are those who are not dead -- not yet, at any rate. That they will surely die, some sooner, some later, should not delay us here.

There is this link, an umbilical cord, if you don't mind. The reported dearth of housing for the dead is only the other side of the dearth of housing for the living. This trouble started when we failed to organise the arrivals in some sensible equation with the possible departures. Now there is no way you can reduce the departures -- and the consequent demand for housing for the departed -- without doing something effective about keeping the arrivals in containable proportions.

However, it may not be quite correct to say that there is no way to rise to the occasion. Necessity is the mother of invention. Nowhere is this problem of housing for the dead -- shortage of graves, in plain words -- more pressing than in Karachi.

But Karachi manages to devise solutions to its problems. In the first place, it no longer tries to solve any problem. Everything in its world depends on a distant government, or the God Almighty.

Neither is approachable this side of the grave. Having thus learned about the futility of human endeavour, Karachi is the most stoic city in the world. If there is a problem, Karachi just lives with it

About the graveyard problem? Well, Karachi has solved this problem of the housing for the dead quite as it has solved the problem of housing for the living.

There is multi-storeyed accommodation for both. For the living the accommodation is in the nature of high-rise architecture. The multi-storeyed housing for the dead is sub-soil. Rawalpindi had better borrow a page off Karachi's remedy for the shortage of housing for the departed. Multi-storeyed resting places.

These will of course go down and down, not up and up. What difference does it make to those who have said their final good-bye, anyway? Something here for Rawalpindi -- from Karachi with love.

Saturday, April 24

· This predates the "Mera Ghar" inspiration.

Saturday, April 24



Benazir would come back, if...

Our former prime minister Ms Benazir Bhutto has a rather wry, also a bit rusted, sense of humour. She is offering to return home -- if "democracy is restored." Suppose that happens tomorrow? As per her word she would return. Then, what?

We should feel assured that upon her return she will lose no time in getting down to her job. The first move would be to issue a rallying call to her janisaris or Jiyalas as they are in the argot of the Pakistan Peoples Party. Having done that, she will assume command of her forces, being the supremo for life. Then, of course, to the job.

What will the job be? Naturally the one she knows best -- dismantling democracy. Shorn of incidentals, the reason she chose exile is that she felt there was not much left of democracy for her to demolish. She had done a fairly comprehensive job of undoing whatever she had inherited from the twice dismissed prime minister Nawaz Sharif. For the loose ends that remained to be tidied up, she could depend upon the one destined to succeed her. He had been doing exactly that when his hand was stayed.

Between Oxford-Harvard graduate Benazir Bhutto and democracy there is a very remarkable equation of antipathy. The two just cannot co-exist. Democracy is all about respect for basic human rights. Read the reports of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan to educate yourself about how Ms Bhutto feels and tends to act about them.

For second opinion, refer to the reports of the Amnesty International, the Asia Watch, and other human rights monitors across the world. Ms Benazir Bhutto would like us to believe that she is on line with her friends in the United States. Possibly some junior assistants in the Department of State.

This being so, let us suggest that reference be had to reports compiled by the government of the United States on the state of human right in Pakistan, during the years Ms Benazir Bhutto was the all-powerful ruler of this country. These provide an insight into her passionately held political beliefs. Among these democracy appears very prominently -- as the bull's eye on the shooting

target.

Opposition-baiting is normal activity in our political culture. Officers in government services are by now well trained to make life miserable for the perceived opponents of the perceived government of the day. They go about their business without waiting for orders. Going hammer and tongs for the opposition is a compulsive trait of Ms Benazir Bhutto. It is seen as congenital by those who cannot consign the recollections of the Dalai Camp to oblivion.

During her reign, Ms Benazir Bhutto notched up the distinction that was extraordinary even by her known inclinations. Her interior minister issued orders to "shoot at sight" on fellow citizens. Such abuse of state force has been almost unknown in civil situations. Only in times of war, occupation forces issue "shoot at sight" orders to scare the occupied people and to make them submit. These orders were actually issued and carried out without stint. Her minions never hesitated to burst into peoples' homes to do as they wished.

Ms Benazir Bhutto went into our history as one who witnessed the brutal murder of her own younger brother (the only one surviving) when she was herself the head of the government. The fell deed was committed within yards of the gates of the very home where she was born and had played as a child. In that carnage many lives were lost on the spot. More ought not to be said about it. The case is in court.

In order to acquaint ourselves with the kind of reverence she showed to foundational institutions of the democratic state, let us only recall the "Baba Go" rumpus right from the floor of the parliament. BB was personally leading that outburst. The admonition was administered to none else but the constitutional head of the state, the President, that is.

For the highest court of law of the republic, Ms Benazir Bhutto had reserved her very special imperial ire. She launched her missiles on the Supreme Court from her prime ministerial seat on the treasury bench in the Parliament of the democracy of which she was the prime minister.

A democratic state has three pillars: the executive (prime minister), the legislature (the parliament), and the judiciary (Supreme Court). As prime minister, she treated all of them with her brand of even-handed justice. She showed disdain and distaste for all of them in equal measure and at the same time, without the least hesitation. Restraint is alien to her nature.

The Press is the fourth pillar of the democratic state. Now, add the electronic media to this estate. For the Press Ms Benazir Bhutto had a mistrust bordering on phobia and impatience that could be hysterical. The electronic media was kept not under the thumb but under the toe.

Ms Benazir Bhutto says she would deign to return home if democracy is restored. Suit yourself, madam.

Friday, October 15.



BB's Great expectations

Hardly had the dust settled on the late Nawaz Sharif administration that Ms Benazir Bhutto started begging to be put in that vacant prime ministerial slot. "I will return home to my people," to become the prime minister of Pakistan, is her refrain. Look who is talking. Haste has many shades. This must be its dimmest.

What does she think Pakistan is? A trash heap? And what on earth does she think she is? As far as the people of Pakistan know, she is twice dismissed from the position of prime minister in this country. Each time the dismissal was for allegations of the gravest kind of wrongdoing, misconduct and abuse of exactly that power to which she thinks she can be restored automatically.

Ms Benazir Bhutto cannot be divested of her right to wish for the moon. If wishes were horses, she should still be riding roughshod on everything of value in Pakistan. That is what distinguishes her in a line of our tainted political leaders. Among all of them nobody has been so utterly insensitive to the pain and suffering of the people in Pakistan. The way the people's rights were trampled upon was never so crudely cruel. Only she can forget that her interior minister issued orders to "shoot at sight." Decent citizens cannot.

She has still to come clean on a long list of allegations. However, law requires that anyone, standing trial for serious wrongdoing tantamount to culpable indiscretion, must first obtain a clean bill of moral health before claiming to be a duly enfranchised citizen. There are certain categories of citizens who are deprived of some of their political rights. This includes aspiring to be prime minister.

Ms Benazir Bhutto has admitted in public that she made "mistakes." Those mistakes turned out to be so egregious as to cause her to be removed from the office of the prime minister, not once but twice. What about those mistakes? These include, among so much that was disagreeable, the 'extrajudicial killings' that took place during her term in office.

In civilised society, one is expected to express some repentance, some

remorse over "mistakes" committed. A public apology is called for. Particularly when such "mistakes" were committed while in an office so responsible as that of the head of the government. What has she done to date to indicate to the people that she is capable of being human and feeling remorse in her heart. So much of blood was spilled during her rule. How is one to forget the murder of her own younger (and the only one by then surviving) brother? This happened when she was the all-powerful prime minister. So many other lives were lost in that carnage.

Many people in Pakistan sincerely feel afraid of her as a person in any seat of power or responsibility, not to speak of the position of the head of government. No single person in the life of Pakistan has caused such unrelieved feeling of being cynically deserted and abandoned as Ms Benazir Bhutto. Time and again, the people of Pakistan have presented their heart to her. They did not care even for the terror of the most ruthless dictator in Pakistan's history, only to embrace her. And twice in power she proved that, apart from so many graces one associated with a lady, she was also without a human heart.

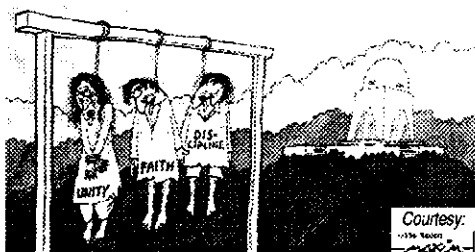
Millions in Pakistan are still wondering why Oxford university failed to bring out any presentable trait in her chemistry and why she remained supremely impervious to the ennobling influence of Harvard. These words fall vastly short of expressing the feeling of being brutally betrayed by Benazir. This nation was looking forward to a lady leader, adorned with the graces of good education, good parentage, good breeding, true democratic culture and a commitment to the eternal human values. What they got was petty tricks, unending stream of untruths, insatiable greed, arrogance and total absence of any trace of grace in BB's word or deed.

Heading the Peoples Party, her equation with the people was negative. She never addressed public meetings. Her only mass contact was through the rubbish-spewing PTV. Her father could pull millions out into the streets. Once she was in office, her disdain for the people was beyond belief.

She abandoned even the nobler part of her father's inheritance. Use of the people's idiom of *roti, kapra and makan* was placed under a blanket ban.. Instead, she was buying diamond-studded necklaces, the most expensive sports cars, her husband collecting the most expensive stable of race horses and polo ponies -- at the expense of the poor people. With all that, she aspires to be prime minister of Pakistan a third time. That's some nerve, but not untypical of Benazir Zardari.

If she has any sense of moral right and wrong, it is about time she thought of doing some penance. Where she belongs at this stage of her life is a penitentiary, a reformatory, if not a Borstal -- not the prime minister's house in Islamabad..

Friday, October 22.



Is this the Pakistan Jinnah wanted?

Among the several thoughts that must be crossing the minds of intelligent citizens at this moment is the exasperating question why our leaders never learn, nor ever unlearn, anything. A look at the records of two young leaders, and their five prime ministerial careers in just about ten years, leaves all of us bewildered in depressing disbelief.

Remarkable are the similarities in their careers in power, brief as they were, each time. How much of disgrace there was every time they fell from heights of power to the depth that were just abysmal and pathetic. Both were twice dismissed, each time on account of conduct irredeemably dishonourable. To be exact, Nawaz Sharif was dismissed thrice, because he was dismissed twice by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, before being bundled out by General Pervez Musharraf.

Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif have left records in power that are tainted with sickening loot and grab. Both stand accused of defalcation of public funds in titanic proportions. The two of them, and their cronies and tail-bearers, are alleged to have siphoned off hundreds of billions of rupees worth of national wealth. Much of this plundered wealth of this poor nation is believed to be held abroad.

No longer in doubt is that both Nawaz Sharif and Ms Benazir Bhutto directly or indirectly own, possess and enjoy free use of enormous personal fortunes safely maintained abroad. We have heard of the mansion in Surrey. Much the same is being said about flats the Sharifs own in London. If the versions of property in Surrey or London have not been proved, nor have they been convincingly disproved.

The overall record of both in financial dealings only lends strength to suspicions of the darkest nature. In the case of those in public life, public perception about their conduct matters a great deal. That is just what neither of them ever cared two hoots for. The people never entered their plots.

If anything, the image that the name Nawaz (and brother Shahbaz) Sharif projects in public mind is a touch darker. It may be noted that as the Sharif

brothers went on the rampage, they also let their pals and family servants loose and free to loot. Nawaz Sharif & Co may have caused more damage. In the measure of cynicism of conduct, they do not rank lower than rival Benazir Bhutto.

Benazir Bhutto has had two terms in office. Both ended in dismissals for corruption and many other transgressions. However, Nawaz Sharif now ranks higher in this league. As already noted, Nawaz Sharif had already been dismissed twice, before he was summarily removed from office on October 12. That makes three dismissals. The scenario of this event has more of drama than the other downfalls we have seen. There is probably much more to it than we have as yet heard or seen.

Numerically, Nawaz Sharif can claim to have more scalps in his cupboard than Benazir Bhutto in hers. But what the lady may appear to lack in mass destructive capability, she more than made up with her unbridled arrogance and a devouring ego. Nawaz Sharif could always manage to present the 'killer' and the 'collector' inside him in presentable garbs and postures. There was more in his cricket gloves than met the eye of the umpires.

If either of them, or both of them, had just a little of common sense to learn from their own mistakes, today they would have been two happier persons in a happy and fairly well to do Pakistan. They failed even to learn from the glaring errors of each other. Blinded by rapacious greed and haunted by a sense of insecurity (product of guilty conscience), Benazir and Nawaz only replicated the horrors of each other. This is the ultimate that evil genius can give birth to.

We shall have to admit that in the eyes of the world today several attributes distinguish Pakistan. No 1: it is one of the most corrupt countries, that is, a country under some of the most corrupt governments in the world: No 2: its human rights record is among the dimmest in the world; No 3: it is among the countries that spare the least cash and attention to education, health and the girl child; No 4: it has more under (or without) trial persons in its prisons per thousand of people than in any comparable country. No 5. it has seen more women killed in cold blood in the name of 'honour' than anywhere in the world today: No 6, it has witnessed its constitution being abrogated, abolished, or held in abeyance more often than in any comparable country in the world.

For more than ten years Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif held absolute power. They have left the country vastly poorer, mistreated, compromised and humiliated than they found it. The plundered and insulted people of Pakistan may, in time, forget the demoniac misdeeds of these two tormentors. The people may even forgive. But what about history?

History neither forgets, nor condones, and most certainly never forgives.
Sunday, October 17.



APPENDIX I

The traitors' gallery

BRANDING political rivals and opponents as traitors or enemy (Indian, Soviet and again Indian) agents betrays nothing better than sheer political bankruptcy, moral debility and rank bad manners on the part of the accusers. It becomes a moral crime when the accuser is in control of State apparatus and abuses State power in a bid to destroy the person so diabolically abused. In terms of our history this syndrome would appear to have begun with the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan. He accused Husseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy of being an Indian agent. Liaquat Ali Khan also referred to him, however indirectly, as an Indian cur. He was obviously trying to paint Suhrawardy as an Indian agent, hoping that Suhrawardy's peacekeeping stint in autumn, 1947 in West Bengal with the Indian leader, M K Gandhi, would lend credence to the terrible accusation.

Some may be tempted to go further back and come up with the theory that the tradition of doubting opponent's loyalty began with the founder of Pakistan. It was Quaid-i-Azam who caused the elected government in the Frontier province to be dismissed. But there is a difference – a qualitative one. The All India Congress Chief Minister of the Frontier province had, or was credibly alleged to have, refused to join in saluting the flag of Pakistan during the inaugural ceremonies on August 14, 1947. One may leave the matter at that to the free judgement of the citizens of Pakistan.

Suhrawardy, whom Liaquat Ali Khan tried to paint as Indian agent and hence a traitor, and tormented him (as did succeeding governments of Pakistan) survived the vilification to be sworn in as Pakistan's 5th Prime Minister (September 12, 1956-October 18, 1957). In many ways, a very distinguished one. That he was later to be humiliated all over again by Pakistan's first military dictator Field Marshal Ayub Khan only demonstrates the terrible truth that this streak of murderous malice runs through our political tradition.

There is any number of notable and respectable politicians and political workers in our history who have been labelled as traitors and enemy agents. If a list were to be compiled of all those so accused and abused in this evil manner, the names would run into hundreds. To be maliciously accused, and then paraded, as Indian agent is the ultimate in human misfortune in Pakistan.

In the 1950s the technology to annihilate political opponents underwent a major change. It became much easier to liquidate the perceived foe by simply insinuating a Moscow connection. During Pakistan's notorious alignment with Red-baiting United States and the era of military pacts (Cento & Seato), hundreds if not thousands of young people were sent to jail without so much as a show trial. Many died (that is, were killed) in prison. In those dark days of Pakistan's blood-stained McCarthyism the easiest way to get rid of a possible rival was to have him declared a "red" (surkha) and the Special Police, the IB and other secret services would do the rest. That man may not survive for long. So many didn't.

Dr Khan Saheb, elder brother of the Frontier Gandhi Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, was the second Indian agent and traitor in Pakistan's history. His brother Frontier Gandhi (or the Bacha Khan, as he was called by his adoring Red Shirt followers) was arguably the first. Then the very same Pakistani nation, which had applauded the humiliation of Dr Khan Saheb in August 1947, was to see him installed as the first Chief Minister of the One Unit. Be it noted that late One Unit was then less than half of Pakistan then. Now it is the whole of Pakistan! That's the sort of chameleon that Pakistan's politics was then. It is much more deceptive and venomous now.

When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, once the blue-eyed boy of dictator Ayub Khan, fell from grace, assiduous efforts were made by the 'sensitive agencies' of the government of Pakistan to smear him with the most convenient tar -- the allegation of being an Indian citizen, an Indian agent. Under the Field Marshal's instructions the honourable and indefatigable instruments of the State security worked overtime and surfaced with documentary "proof" of Bhutto's intimate and secret links with India and treachery to Pakistan. A mighty campaign was mounted to character-assassinate Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Nobody cared to ask the infuriated (scared?) Field Marshal why were these horrifying secrets not taken care of before Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was inducted into his august government, in the first place? As a matter of fact, a special screening is supposed to be done in the normal course before a person is taken into government. The discipline is more strict when a person is elevated to the position of Foreign Minister to which Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was elevated, not much later.

People are seen as Indian agents and traitors only when they are groping in the uncharted wildernesses of the opposition and those in power for the time being find them inconvenient. Being in control of power in Pakistan means

being in a position to abuse State apparatus to annihilate the adversary by this vile tactic -- among many others.

ZULFIKAR Ali Bhutto was perhaps the first political figure who was twice decorated: first as an Indian citizen and Indian agent, and, then as a murderer. Since then this fashion of tormenting the political adversary has undergone a refinement. To the charge of being an Indian agent are now added all manner of petty as well as serious criminal offences like abduction, arson, attempted murder and, finally murder or a chain of murders, all in cold blood. Occasionally, the target is also accused of moral turpitude like 'de-flowering' of innocent maidens by the score at a time.

During the reign of the longest ruling military dictator, Gen Ziaul Haq, we saw the first elected Prime Minister of Pakistan charged with murder and hanged in a hurry. To this day the manner of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's trial arouses not only intense revulsion but the darkest doubts about the validity of the judicial process. (See Aitzaz Ahsan, *The Nation*, Page 7, July 27, 1995 and Gen F A Chishti, *The Nation* Page 7, July 31, 1995).

This being no ordinary criminal trial, one should expect that the law of contempt of court would not be reluctant to countenance some comment. But for the purpose of this book, that may not be necessary. Suffice it to say that in Pakistan the saddest part of this story is that instead of shedding this terrible tendency of bloodthirsty intolerance for political opposition, we have all along been strengthening and increasingly poisoning it. All parties are equally guilty and to be equally condemned for this singularly odious and obviously culpable trait. It is not unfair to say that today this pathological condition is touching its most malignant point ever.

Having hanged his political opponent Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the military ruler Gen Ziaul Haq strove with a demonic dedication to destroy the Bhutto family, literally root and branch. There was not a known method of torment that the dictator did not apply to make life unendurable for the Bhutto ladies and the Bhutto boys. In this diseased pursuit all agencies under the control of the government slavishly obeyed the perverse command of the obsessed dictator. And without a trace of the kind of self-respect or dignity of the state security services to which they were privileged to belong to. It is said that even petty thieves have an unwritten code of honour.

After Ziaul Haq, his chief confidant Ghulam Ishaq Khan as the President of Islamic Republic carried on the fell mission. GIK and Ziaul Haq had been hand in glove in secret while Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the Prime Minister and believed he was the lord and master of all he surveyed. How they conspired under cover and how they succeeded in toppling the Bhutto government and democracy in Pakistan, is subject for another book. GIK was secretary-general in the ministry of defence when Ziaul Haq, the Chief of Army Staff

(COAS) of Pakistan was blithely hatching his plot to subvert Pakistan itself.

Ghulam Ishaq Khan was assailed by the same fears which kept Ziaul Haq restless, being the co-conspirator. For this purpose he hi-jacked the province of Sindh from the hands of an easy-going, Faluda-loving, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. It seems that Nawaz Sharif was only too glad to be rid of an unmanageable annoyance which he thought Sindh was. With the help of Jam Sadiq Ali, planted as Chief Minister (in disregard of all parliamentary principles and decorum), GIK inaugurated his exterminate-Benazir Bhutto campaign. To assist the tyrant Jam Sadiq Ali, GIK provided the services of his own son-in-law Irfanullah Marwat. The Jam-Marwat duo left no stone unturned, not a trick in a trade of tyranny undeployed, in the pursuit of their only objective: Finish all the Bhuttos once and for all time.

Benazir Bhutto was accused of practising terror, of being an Indian agent, of being the real head, and soul of the Al-Zulfikar Organisation (AZO), painted as the ultimate in terror. The AZO was allegedly involved in the hi-jacking of a PIA airliner to Kabul which resulted in several deaths. Since the days of dictator Zia the AZO label had been used as very much an instrument to torment the entire Bhutto family and the Pakistan People's Party.

So, we have seen the procession of the history of Pakistan, trailed all along by an uninterrupted line of traitors and Indian agents, right up to the arrival of Benazir on the political scene. Now, once again look at this incredible spectacle: Dr Khan Saheb, the traitor and Indian agent of 1947, rising to be the Chief Minister of One Unit, that is the whole of what is now Pakistan; H S Suhrawardy, the traitor of 1947-49 rising to be the 5th Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1956; Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the Indian citizen and Indian agent and traitor of 1967-68, rising to be the first (post-Partition) elected and also the most charismatic Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1971; the terror-master of AZO, Indian agent Benazir Bhutto of the late 1970s and most of the 1980s becoming Prime Minister in 1988; then once again becoming an AZO chief and Indian agent according to Sindh Chief Minister Jam Sadiq Ali, until elected a second time Prime Minister in 1993! That is what she is at the moment.

One should have expected and ardently hoped that with the reincarnation of Oxford-Harvard luminary Benazir Bhutto, we shall witness the end of this witch-craft, this mental disorder, moral depravity and insatiable thirst for political blood that afflicts all power-wielders in Pakistan. Alas that was not to be.

Nobody in Pakistan's history knows more of suffering as a result of political skulduggery than Ms Benazir Bhutto. She has perhaps suffered more agonising calumny and humiliation, as well as physical and mental torment, than even her ill-fated father. How shocking it is to see this young lady with

the best possible education and upbringing, following compulsively in the footsteps of some of the most Draconian and stonehearted of Pakistan's self-seeking and, in the process, self-destroying, rulers who have invariably left Pakistan badly damaged and enfeebled. The single-minded implementation of hot-pursuit campaign launched by Ms Bhutto against her perceived adversaries has all the horrifying weaponry of Ziaul Haq's lethal arsenal: political blackmail, accusations of treason and treachery, allegations of moral turpitude and murderous crimes, financial misdeeds and what have you.

A weird mystery hangs over the origins of bad blood between the MQM and the Army command in Karachi. Nawaz Sharif was the Prime Minister of Pakistan when on June 19, 1992 the Army was inducted in Sindh. He has now broken his silence over this chapter – nearly three years after the event. He seems to say, be it by implication, that the late Gen Asif Nawaz exceeded his authority in roughing up the MQM and setting up a rival in the shape of MQM (Haqiqi). Let us first take due note of what the incontrovertible truth and hard undeniable reality available to us.

a) The Army raided MQM headquarters at 90 Azizabad, Karachi in the early hours on June 29, 1992 and literally jack-booted the rightful people out, planting the newly formed MQM (Haqiqi);

b) Nawaz Sharif says that was not a part of the task given by the government to the Army;

c) Action against MQM top leadership was unauthorised;

d) When the Army moved into Karachi, it was moving beyond its mandate;

e) The Prime Minister (Nawaz Sharif) was then out of the country on an official visit;

f) MQM's appeals to President Ghulam Ishaq Khan to save it from Army action went unheeded in the beginning; only much later, GIK made a show of sympathy; and,

g) COAS Gen Asif Nawaz spoke about the birth of a new faction in the MQM in a casual manner, saying that all parties had factions, if the MQM too had one (presumably implying the newly installed Haqiqi faction) the heavens won't fall – or words to that effect.

It is also a fact that when the plans to induct the Army in Sindh were being formulated, all confidential work was being done in the President's House, in the absence of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who was very much in the capital. Although former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has dropped hints and disjointed and incoherent (till the time of writing) bits and pieces, he had still to come up with a full account of what he thinks actually happened which led to the Army moving in force into Karachi and taking on MQM and its top leadership including Altaf Hussain – in disregard of authorisation, as alleged by him.

What outside observers can do in their quest for the real and full truth is to make guesses, surmises, put the available twos and twos together.

Nawaz Sharif has also hinted that Gen Asif Nawaz may have had his own plans. What plans? Nawaz Sharif shies away from facing this question. But the context being what it can be seen to be, plans could mean anything, or any of those things which are a part of our national experience from Gen Ayub, Gen Yahya and Gen Zia. Another fact which cannot be denied is that at the moment when Gen Asif Nawaz chose to act the way he did vis-à-vis the MQM, this party (MQM) was a coalition partner of the Nawaz Sharif government. Be it noted at the same time, that MQM and PPP had earlier fallen out after being partners in Benazir Bhutto's first abridged government. Nawaz Sharif was in a working equation with the MQM while the PPP was estranged from MQM. If Gen Asif Nawaz was working to do the MQM down he would be positioning himself away from Prime Minister in power and the lawful government of the day, even if not deliberately moving closer to the PPP opposition to the government and the PPP leader Benazir Bhutto.

As already stated, these are guesses, surmises, calculations based upon some facts and some hypothetical propositions. Once it is assumed that Nawaz Sharif's assertion (that the nature of Army action, as instituted by the then COAS Asif Nawaz, was not congruent with the government's authorisation) is acceptable at its face value, some naggingly inescapable questions would raise their unlovely heads. Those concerned owe it to the nation to tell the truth and the whole of it. Gen Asif Nawaz is no more, but the Supreme Commander of the armed forces at that time, former President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, is very much alive. It is his moral duty to react to what Nawaz Sharif has now started mumbling about and what Altaf Hussain has been less vaguely shrieking about all the time.

Just as a matter of thinking aloud, let us suppose as a hypothesis, that Gen Asif Nawaz had ideas similar to Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan or Ziaul Haq. If there is a pattern in Karachi's misfortunes, it is that since Ayub Khan to this day, the city refuses to surrender to those who impose themselves upon it by questionable means and demand unqualified submission. By now Karachi's psyche as a totally nonconformist city is established beyond doubt. May be, Gen Asif Nawaz thought to himself to test the Karachi waters before taking the obliquely alleged leap. Or to test the guts and stamina of the incumbent Prime Minister. It is reasonable to assume that in whatever Gen Asif Nawaz did, or was allegedly trying to do, he felt assured of President GIK's blessings. Or, he expected to receive them when the time came. Be that as it may, GIK would be a prominent figure in whatever the picture that emerges, if clearly emerge it ever would.

What we are left with is that whatever Gen Asif Nawaz's purposes, his

action left Karachi badly mauled in body, and lacerated in soul. The most tragic part of this tearful episode in Karachi's and Pakistan's, history is that it soured the Karachi-Army equation. What has followed the Karachi campaign of the late Gen Asif Nawaz has only tended to deepen and widen Karachi's million wounds. Can it be said that the Benazir government is pursuing the Gen Asif Nawaz line? Or that Gen Asif Nawaz had anticipated Benazir Bhutto as the Prime Minister on the way and initiated what he perceived would be her government's line?

These are questions which call for an answer.

APPENDIX II

200 families that rule Pakistan

PAST and present rulers were tied to one another by virtue of nuptial knots and so the cream of Pakistan society, be they in power or in the opposition, are related to one another, enquiries made by this correspondent (Ahmar Mustikhan) has revealed.

As such scions of a few dozen leading families, who had gained prominence at the time of independence and during the days of the (British) Raj are still very much saddled in power and one or the other cousins occupy coveted seats.

Regardless of whether the Pakistan People's Party or its arch nemesis Pakistan and kin is invariably in the corridors of power, at the federal and provincial levels.

Most of them belong to the feudal families of all four provinces and also enterprising bureaucrats and soldiers who rose to positions of prominence.

"Though being a Baloch Sardar himself", President Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari has strong connections mostly with the Frontier province as the president's wife and grandmother were both Pushtuns.

"By virtue of cross marriages President Leghari, ex-president Ghulam Ishaq Khan, NWFP Chief Minister Sherpao and Army Chief General Abdul Waheed Kakar have one or the other relation amongst themselves," says veteran politician and senior parliamentarian, Sardar Sherbaz Mazari.

Mr Mazari, who is chief of the Baloch tribe of the same name and hails from Dera Ghazi Khan, is himself a brother-in-law of former Balochistan Governor and ex-chief minister Nawaz Akbar Khan Bugti. Another Mazari brother, Mir Balakh Sher, was caretaker premier last year.

The Speaker of the National Assembly Yusuf Raza Gilani is related to the spiritual leader of the Hurs and PML (Functional) chief Pir Pagaro. Pagaro is what is called Khaloo (husband of mother's sister) of Gilani. Pir Pagara's

wife and Gilani's mother are sisters, whose brother Makhdoom Hasan Mahmood was a minister during the Ayub days.

Via Hasan Mahmood, President Leghari too, is related to Pir Pagara. President Leghari's elder sister was married to the late Hasan Mahmood.

A member of the Ms Benazir Bhutto's kitchen cabinet, Defence Minister Aftab Shaban Mirani, is related to the premier. Mr Mirani's sister was the wife of Imdad Ali Bhutto, elder brother of slain premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Mr Mirani himself is married to a sister of former senior minister Rahim Baksh Soomro.

Former federal minister Elahi Baksh Soomro, who is a first cousin and brother-in-law of Rahim Baksh, is presently a top leader of the Pakistan Muslim League and close aide of ex-premier Nawaz Sharif.

Likewise, the eldest sister of Governor Mahmoud A Haroon is married to Anwar Hidayatullah, who is the eldest son of the first chief minister of Sindh, and also its first governor after independence. The late Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah.

Lady Hidayatullah, meanwhile, is a direct descendant of the Durrani rulers of Afghanistan and one of her granddaughters is married to President Leghari's younger brother, Punjab provincial minister Maqbool Leghari. Balochistan's ex-chief minister Justice (Retd) Khuda Baksh Marri's daughter meanwhile, is married to a grandson of Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah.

Interestingly enough, the Bhuttos and Hidayatullahs too are related to one another, though the exact nature of the relations never been made public.

Ex-chief minister of Sindh Qaim Ali Shah is a maternal uncle, or so to say mamoo, of Sindh information minister Pervez Ali Shah.

Excise and Taxation Minister Munawar Talpur is married to a sister of Premier Bhutto's spouse, Asif Ali Zardari.

Former town planning minister Siraj Durrani, who is nephew of former Sindh Assembly speaker Agha Badruddin Durrani, PML (N) women wing chief Tooba Durrani and PPP Sindh Information Cell in charge Ghazanfar Hidayatullah are cousins.

In Balochistan, a sister of Chief Minister Zulfikar Ali Magsi is married to Home and Tribal Affairs Minister Nawabzada Gazain Marri, son of one of the godfathers of Baloch nationalist Nawab Khair Baksh Marri.

Nawab Magsi's mother is from the Zarakzai clan and thus he is a cousin of the chief of Jhalawan, provincial local government minister Sardar Sanaullah Zehri.

Ex-caretaker chief minister Mir Humayoon Marri is a nephew of Nawaz Marri, while Humayoon's mother is a niece of the late Khan of Kalat and ex-governor Mir Ahmed Yar Khan.

One of the daughters of Nawab Khair Baksh Marri's is married to Senator

Javed Mengal. Javed is a son of ex-chief minister Sardar Ataullah Mengal and elder brother of Balochistan National Movement chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal.

Sardar Ataullah Mengal and one of his arch rivals, the late Jafar Mir Ghulam Qadir, were also related as their wives were sisters. Thus, Balochistan Senior Minister Jam Mohammad Yousuf and Sardar Akhtar Mengal are first cousins.

Sardar Ataullah had also married a sister of PPP leader and ex-minister Saleh Bhuttani.

Nawab Akbar Bugti's eldest son. MPA Nawabzada Salim Bugti, is a son-in-law of ex-senator and chief of his own PML faction Mir Nabi Baksh Zehri, Nawab Bugti's ex-senior and chief of his own PML faction Mir Nabi Baksh Zehri. Nawab Bugti's nephew Tariq Khetran is provincial minister, while Nawab Bugti's son-in-law Sardar Chakar Khan Dombki is an opposition MPA.

Some of the nuptial knots had resulted in divorce; the divorced wife of Akbar Liaquat Ali, son of Pakistan's first premier Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, later married Sindhi nationalist leader Mumtaz Ali Khan Bhutto.

-The News, Karachi, November 6, 1994

APENDIX III

Women under trial

HRCP report for Punjab

Women under-trials outnumber Convicts 9 to 1

Omar R. Quraishi,
reporting in DAWN,
Karachi.

LAHORE, Oct. 30: Women under-trial prisoners outnumber women actually convicted of a crime by a ratio of more than nine to one, a report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) suggests. This ratio of under-trial to convict is more than double that for the prison population as a whole, "indicating that women bear the brunt of discrimination even when it comes to prisoners in general". In addition to this, over a third of these women undergoing trial have no defence lawyers.

The 76-page report, Profiles of Vulnerability: Female Under-trial prisoners in Punjab, has based its conclusions on information from surveys done at Gujranwala, Mianwali and Dera Ghazi Khan Central jails and from five of the lesser or smaller district jails in Faislabad, Gujrat, Rahim Yar Khan, Jhelum and Attock.

The report says that as of June 1 this year these eight jails housed a total of 242 women who were being detained there and tried for various offences. Almost half of them, or 120, were charged under the Hudood laws, and 107 under the Zina ordinance. Sixty eight were being tried for murder and 21 for possession of narcotics.

However, for the larger picture, the report mentions figures collected in 1998 but adds that these will still be relevant and the general pattern will

remain since the numbers being freed are more than compensated by new additions to the prison population. These figures are collected from the eight central jails of the Punjab (in Rawalpindi, Mianwali, Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, Lahore, Dera Ghazi Khan and Gujranwala), the women's jail in Multan, and 11 district jails (Sargodha, Sialkot, Attock, Jhang, Faisalabad, Gujrat, Kasur, Jhelum, Rahim Yar Khan, Shahpur Sadar and Bahawalnagar).

At that time 973 women were in jail but of these almost ninety per cent or 871 were still undergoing trial. The report tries to explain this by suggesting that one reason for disproportionate difference might be that women are sometimes falsely implicated because they are perceived to come from the more vulnerable segments of the population. As for legal aid, 302 of the women prisoners are undergoing trial without a defence lawyer.

AGE, MARITAL STATUS: As far as age is concerned, close to 45 per cent of these 973 women were between the ages of 26 and 40 while 30 per cent were between 16 and 25. A total of 70 prisoners, or over 8 per cent of the total, were women who were over 50 years old. The report says that a "high number" of the women above the age of 45 were accused of murder while most of those above 50 had been accused of running a brothel. In addition to this, 27 of the 41 prisoners under the age of 18 were being tried under the Zina laws. Looking at an overall picture, over 45 per cent or 395 women had been charged under the Hudood and Zina ordinances while 194 had been accused of murder, and an even greater number, 220, were charged with various narcotics offences.

The report mentions what it says is a typical example of such a case. Shabana who is in Faisalabad jail is 16 years old, is a widow and has been accused of extra-marital sex. Shabana also does not have a defence lawyer and she belongs to a family of labourers.

Another case is of a 14 year old girl in Multan jail who was being tried under the same offence and one 12 years old who was being tried for "abetting abduction". Then there is a 15 year old girl who was being detained at Gujranwala's Central Jail. She had been accused of murder and of participating in unlawful assembly while carrying explosive arms.

Of the 871 women prisoners undergoing trial, 650 or almost three-quarters were married, the husbands of 106 had passed away and 90 were single.

PROFESSION: The report also gives a breakdown of the profession of the 871 women who were undergoing trial. Almost 90 per cent or 781 of these are women who described themselves as housewives working at home. Only four had a private job, four said they had a government job, 51 were described as labourers, 5 said they were self-employed and four were students at the time they were put in custody.

CHILDREN: 871 under-trial prisoners had 157 young children or infants

who were living with their mothers inside the jail. Compared to these figures, these women also had a total of 1,946 children living outside the prison, presumably at home with relatives.

GENERAL JAIL POPULATION: Though this report looks specifically at women in jails, it also has some telling facts on the general prisoner population in the country. For instance, it says that figures as late as 1998 showed that a total of 80,795 people were in the country's jails (roughly one in every 1600 persons). Of these only 16,095 (a little less than one-fifth) were actually convicts while the rest were at different stages of trial.

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